

**DRESSING FOR ENGLAND:
FASHION AND NATIONALISM IN VICTORIAN NOVELS**

A Dissertation

by

AMY LOUISE MONTZ

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2008

Major Subject: English

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ABSTRACT

Dressing for England: Fashion and Nationalism in Victorian Novels. (August 2008)

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Victorian women were not merely the symbols of nation nineteenth-century imagery would suggest in an era marked by the images of Queen Victoria and the symbolic representation of Britannia. They also were producers, maintainers, and even protectors of England at a time when imperial anxiety and xenophobic fears called the definition of Englishness into question. Dress, particularly fashionable dress, often was viewed as a feminine weakness in Victorian England. At the same time women were chastised for their attentions to the details of their clothing, they also were instructed to offer a pretty and neat presentation publicly and privately. Novels by George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, William Thackeray, and H. G. Wells and manners and conduct texts by such authors as Sarah Stickney Ellis, Eliza Lynn Linton, and Margaret Oliphant demonstrate how Victorian women used fashion and dress to redefine and manipulate the socially accepted understanding of traditional English womanhood and to communicate national ideologies and concerns without violating or transgressing completely the more passive construction of Victorian femininity.

By declaring their nationality through the public display that is fashion—dress designated by its appeal to a sophisticated, cultured, and perhaps continental society—these fictional and non-fictional women legitimized the demand for female access to social and cultural spheres as well as to the political sphere. Through an examination of the material culture of Victorian England—personal letters about the role of specific dress in Suffragette demonstrations, or the Indian shawl, for example—alongside an examination of the literary texts of the period, “Dressing for England” argues that the novels of the nineteenth century and that century’s ephemera reveal its social concerns, its political crises, and the fabric of its everyday domesticity at the same time they reveal the active and intimate participation of Victorian women in the establishment and maintenance of nation.

DEDICATION

For my family

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: LADIES' BUSINESS, FEMININE WEAKNESS,

FASHIONABLE DRESS

The love of dress is a growing evil, capable of any extravagance, or of any folly to gratify its depraved taste; it is not the love of beauty, or of outward elegance and refinement; for every day we see beauty outraged, and nature deformed, by the tortuous inventions of fashion for their adornment. It is a *mania*, a *passion*, a delusion that spreads its baneful influence through every grade of society: a yawning gulf into which, like the one of old, the wealth of a nation is unavailingly cast. (6-7)

—Anonymous, *Dress, A Few Words on Fashion and Her Idols* (1859)

No other ladies, except the English, thus transgress all the rules of toilette. They alone look awkward and badly-dressed everywhere except at home; and I take the liberty of calling their attention to the fact. (157)

—Chroniqueuse, *Photographs of Paris Life: A Record of the Politics, Art, Fashion, and Anecdote of Paris during the Past Eighteen Months* (1861)

“I have never undervalued dress,” [Phoebe] said, “as some girls do; I think it is a very important social influence.” (120)

—Margaret Oliphant, *Phoebe Junior, A Last Chronicle of Carlingford* (1876)

In reviewing nineteenth-century texts about fashion, we would find an overwhelming proliferation of judgments on the importance of dress: its role in social influence, as Phoebe tells us, its usefulness in distinguishing national citizens, as Chroniqueuse describes, and its dangerousness to a nation at large, as the anonymous author of *Dress* warns. For many writers in the nineteenth century, fashionable dress can inform, delight, disgust, and influence; it can also cause panic and obsession, promote political causes, designate class status or national origin, determine a woman's character or wealth or intention, or perhaps be an object of beauty to attract the eye. But

This dissertation follows the style of *Victorian Studies*.

even when it is “just a dress,” that is, a gendered article of clothing to cover the body, it is never “just a dress,” because it is socially recognizable as beautiful, or because its wearer used it to convey meaning such as class status, or its designer created it to advance recognizable standards of fashion. In understanding that a dress is never “just a dress,” we understand that a person’s dress can speak with or without its wearer’s intent. Dress can convey meaning: to the viewer, to the wearer, to society at large. Margaret Oliphant’s title character Phoebe Tozer uses fashionable dress to convey character, social standing, and personal will. Throughout the text, Oliphant establishes Phoebe’s agency as her character chooses articles of clothing determined by how best they flatter her body and coloring. In the beginning of the novel, Phoebe shops for a ball gown and chooses one made of black fabric despite the protestations of her mother because, as she argues, “Black would be a great deal the best for both of us. It would tone us down [...] and it would throw us up” (57). It is this ability to determine decisively what is best for her that the novel so admires in Phoebe. She understands how fashion and dress help to flatter a body, and how certain colors can both “tone us down,” detract from any defects in coloring or complexion, and “throw us up,” emphasize those parts best highlighted. While some nineteenth-century writers would argue that Phoebe’s understanding of fashion would signal her vanity, Oliphant writes her character to be adored; her portrayal of Phoebe’s intelligence, charm, and adaptability often is revealed through Phoebe’s choices in dress.

For Oliphant, as for many novelists of the Victorian period, fashion is an arena in which women can have power not only over their clothing, but also over their ultimate

presentation of the character they display to the public. In understanding that dress is an influence in the social arena and thus in never undervaluing it, Phoebe intuits that dress is a powerful tool available to her during a time and in a nation that may not undervalue dress, but to no small extent certainly undervalues her, a middle-class unmarried woman. If she does have power it exists within the social realm, and in using dress to influence that realm, Phoebe is manipulating the powerful tool available to her for her own means. Her outward self, displayed through her choices in fashion, reflects not her inner self as many nineteenth-century texts would argue, but rather, the self she wishes to portray.

Dress is both public and private, both personal and social.¹ Men and women in the nineteenth century were influenced by the clothing of those around them and by the opinions of those who viewed them; so, too, were they influenced by personal style and taste, by an understanding of their bodies, and by their wealth and class status. Their dress may have been fashionable and influenced by the larger fashionable arena, like the Indian shawl that was so popular in the middle of the nineteenth century. Or their dress may have been antithetical to fashion: outdated, perhaps unattractive or unflattering, but still capable of conveying a wealth of meaning, like the articles of national dress worn by protesting Suffragettes during the fight for women's enfranchisement. Through these and the thousands of other nuances of dress, the core understanding that clothing is readable by an individual and a society at large is evident. In her eighteen-month record of Paris life, published in London, *Chroniqueuse* claims to be able to distinguish Englishwomen from Frenchwomen strictly by examining their clothing. However, she does not see these Englishwomen as incapable of dressing well. For *Chroniqueuse*, their

unfashionability is a result of their conscious decision to “transgress all the rules of toilette.” The use of the word “transgress” suggests that these English ladies choose to “look awkward and badly-dressed,” and more importantly, choose to do so “everywhere except at home.”² Chroniqueuse’s belief in Englishwomen’s transgression of the rules of fashion while abroad argues that national character, both in the larger, public arena of fashion and in the private, more personal presentation of dress, can be read in or transmitted through dress. By choosing to be unfashionable “everywhere except at home,” these English ladies are choosing to distinguish themselves from the women in the nation they are visiting; this unfashionable dress also makes them easily recognizable to the men and women from their own nation. By presenting themselves as different through their outward appearance in a time that believed outward appearance signaled character, these women attempt to script the public perception of themselves. Through their choices in dress, therefore, these women, like Phoebe, exert control over their reception in the public arena. Chroniqueuse believes that while abroad, these women choose, decisively, to appear “awkward and badly-dressed” in order to mark themselves as Englishwomen in a nation that marks all Englishwomen as “awkward and badly-dressed” (157). By exploiting a stereotype of their nation’s women and their ability to dress fashionably, the Englishwomen are in no small way making a fashion statement of their own: fashion is an arena that they control and in which they have choices.

At the same time it spoke of women’s choice in their dress, whether that choice is contrary or fashionable, the nineteenth century also spoke of women’s excessive love of dress. As fashion became personified and figured as a roving, near-sentient being that

overcame otherwise rational women, fashion also became demonized as a national evil that disfigured Englishwomen's characters through their excessive attention to finery which ultimately leads to their vanity. *Dress* believes that the "love of dress" is a "*mania, a passion, a delusion,*" that the author later calls more dangerous than the commonly believed "interesting feminine weakness" (8), and for the author, this "growing evil" will cast "the wealth of a nation" into "a yawning gulf" (7). Women's love of dress is for this author synonymous with women's vanity, and women's vanity is imagined capable of destroying the wealth of a nation. Like Phoebe, the author of *Dress* understands fashion as a "very important social influence," and the author sees the love of dress spreading throughout "every grade of society."³ This growing panic over the expanding love of dress in all classes of society is in no small part influenced by the fluidity between the classes, and the Victorian anxiety over class mobility. The Victorian era, marked by vast technological innovation, saw an explosion of cheaper printing and thus the insertion of more fashion magazines in its burgeoning media market.⁴ Further, these innovations led to the proliferation of ready-made clothing available for indiscriminate purchasing through innovations in manufacture, and, of course, photography that captured the fashions and dress of persons from every class.

By capturing fashion through photography and by recording the minute details of dress in both fictional and non-fictional texts, the nineteenth century insists that fashion is important enough to record. Because of its intimate connection with the body—dress covers the naked flesh—dress was oftentimes discussed as the public revelation of the private self. But because dress is in constant flux due to shifting fashion trends, personal

choice, and whimsy, dress could suggest artificiality, inconsistency, and manipulation. Phoebe understands this: dress is not to be undervalued for its usefulness in influencing society. The anonymous author of *Dress* understands this, as well, as dress is not to be trusted for its “baneful influence.” By announcing that the “love of dress” is a “baneful influence” irreparably damaging to the “wealth of the nation,” the author of *Dress* equates the love of clothing with the willful destruction of a nation like England; a nation has a status and a character, and both are seemingly at risk because of an arena often designated as a “feminine weakness.” By announcing that dress is “an important social influence,” Phoebe argues for the use of dress as the manipulation of feminine presentation; she can construct a self that may or may not be her authentic self. This construction—the artificiality of clothing that is not to be undervalued—and its influence over nation offer a form of feminine power in a century and a country defined by the dichotomy between its ideological passivity of middle-class women and its ultimate symbol of female power, Queen Victoria. Both public and private, both personal and social, dress is neither solely in the domestic home nor solely in the city streets. Dress is private; it covers the naked body and is worn next to the skin. Dress is personal; it is chosen by the wearer according to taste and current fashion trends. Dress is public; it completes the self and is an outward display of will. Dress is social; it is a common uniting factor among all people, as all people cover and protect the body in some way. To be undressed is, as Anne Hollander argues, a less “natural” state than to be dressed;⁵ the body is clothed more hours of the day than it is unclothed. In this sense, then, dress

is both natural and artificial, and this ill-defined, nebulous state of dress allows it to be scripted and interpreted in order to convey meaning.

All three passages help elucidate this dissertation's argument that at the same time nineteenth-century England viewed dress and particularly fashionable dress as a trivial "feminine weakness," it also viewed it as a dangerous tool with which women maintained, manipulated, and controlled the way that they were perceived. Nineteenth-century women used fashion and dress, heretofore dismissed socially and nationally as an inconsequential feminine concern, to express Englishness abroad, or to influence society at home, or just to convey extravagance, beauty, or elegance, as our three texts believe. By doing so, these women turn the world of fashion into an arena of feminine power, in which they could make choices and decisions that could and would impact their selves, their families, their society, and, in this dissertation's ultimate argument, their nation. All three texts insist that dress can be an empowering arena through which women gain some semblance of command over their selves; even in the passage from *Dress* which views such an arena negatively, dress is an incredibly powerful tool in both the symbolic and literal "separate spheres" in which many critics believe Victorian women existed.⁶ But all three texts react to this empowering arena differently. In Victorian ideology, the power fashion and dress give nineteenth-century women is dangerous precisely because fashion and dress have been relegated to areas of women's concern and feminine weakness, and should thus be trivial things. Yet when women in turn used fashion as a tool with which they communicated personal and national affiliations and constructed selves through artificial means, they challenged the

commonly held beliefs in the insignificance of fashion and dress. I argue that fashion and dress do real work in Victorian England and its literature. This dissertation examines the anxiety and concern over as well as the celebration and mockery of women's fashion and dress reiterated through the era's texts to expose Victorian England's understanding that women's fashion is not trivial at all. For some writers like Oliphant, this important and useful tool is a cause for celebration; for some writers like the anonymous author of *Dress*, this is a dangerous threat to the established paradigm of womanhood.

Reading Fashion and Conveying Nation in Popular Victorian Novels

Fashionable dress expands dress's existence in the public and the social, as fashion is, by its very definition, designed, made, and worn to be viewed by others. If dress, the objects of textiles we wear close to our bodies, is believed to convey meaning beyond simple comfort, protection, or warmth, then fashion, a term that certainly encompasses dress, but also encompasses varying social, cultural, personal, and, particularly important to my argument, national connotations, can convey an even more complicated and highly social meaning. For the purposes of this dissertation, dress is defined as pieces of clothing common to a particular gender or class; fashion is further defined as dress marked in some way by stylishness, popularity, and influence. Many fashion theorists argue that fashion's readability is interesting precisely because it is so varied. As fashion itself is unstable, it should not be surprising that the definitions of "fashion" throughout the centuries are similarly complex. In fact, most definitions seem

to have only two ways of understanding fashion in common: that fashion is, in its most material sense, comprised of various articles of clothing, and that fashion is, in its most abstract sense, comprised of ideals of dress constantly shifting in style and popularity.⁷

Due to its cyclical nature, fashion is constantly marked by change, and Elizabeth Wilson argues that “Fashion, in a sense *is* change” (3, emphasis original). For many fashion theorists and historians, fashion is capable of transmitting and communicating information, and perhaps it is even fashion’s intention. Fred Davis notes that “any definition of *fashion* seeking to grasp what distinguishes it from style, custom, conventional or acceptable dress, or prevalent modes must place its emphasis on the element of *change* we often associate with the term,” and sees that change as “some shift in the relationship of signifier and signified” (14, emphasis original). What may signify fashion one day may, on the next, signify anti-fashion, or perhaps, signify nothing at all, which in turn can become a fashion statement in itself. As fashion is defined by constant change, so is its ability to be read defined by constantly shifting meanings. The interpretation of fashion shifts on various levels, including personal, social, and political, but the use of fashion to convey personal or social meanings and intentions is in constant flux as well. Part of the concern the author of *Dress* expresses over the “growing evil” that the love of dress presents is not necessarily the outrage of beauty, the deformity of nature, or the excessive vanity of women, but rather the fact that fashion is an unstable communicator that can be used to convey and to manipulate socially understood meanings of dress. Most importantly, as characters like Phoebe Tozer show us, women understand that clothing can be manipulated; this is problematic for nineteenth-century

England because women's manipulation of fashion makes fashion useful and purposeful rather than trivial.

The fact that novels often describe dress when establishing characters seems self-explanatory; there seems to be a commonly held assumption that dress will convey something about its wearer. A description of a character's dress may seem arbitrary or merely part of the novelist's style; William Thackeray, for example, is a great detailer of items of dress in his novels. But in a century marked by rapid technological change, and in a genre that reaches its pinnacle of respect and popularity during this time, many nineteenth-century novels offer details of dress that are purposeful beyond the establishment of character. I argue that fashion does real work in nineteenth-century literature, as details of dress, a woman's love of finery, or even a character's attitude toward clothing—Phoebe's understanding of dress as an important social tool—can convey national meaning as it speaks to an audience that understands that fashion can be read. Diana Crane marks clothing as “one of the most visible forms of consumption” that “performs a major role in the social construction of identity” (1), while fashion is more specifically defined by “strong norms about appropriate appearances at a particular point in time” (1). This “social construction of identity” is for Crane often culturally specific (1), and can be used within the culture to gain position or status (5). Anne Hollander agrees with the idea that clothing can “suggest, persuade, connote, insinuate, or indeed lie, and apply subtle pressure while their wearer is speaking frankly and straightforwardly of other matters” (*Seeing Through Clothes* 355), and the “subtle pressure” becomes, when applied to novels, the background description of a character's

dress. These details of dress can belie the statements of their wearer, just as the statements of the wearer can belie the details of dress. When those novelistic details of dress reveal national affiliations, prejudices, or meanings, dress, then, can “suggest, persuade, connote, insinuate, or indeed lie” at the same time it can “apply subtle pressure” about national concerns.

Throughout the nineteenth century, England faced numerous social, political, and technological changes that more often than not were influenced by the expansion of the Empire. The definition of “Britishness” became inextricably connected to the ideas of “Englishness” for the English people. No longer does the designation “Britishness” strictly refer to the British Isles of Wales, Ireland, England, and Scotland. In expanding outward to include countries like India, the British Empire complicates the insular understanding of “British” as defining those peoples who live within close proximity to England.⁸ Further, as the expanding Empire acquired more people, England contracted inward as it attempted to establish definitively what it meant to be English and, in particular, what it mean to be an Englishman or Englishwoman. Angelia Poon argues that “The power that comes from being English in the Victorian period is crucially dependent on a categorizing imperative that establishes and structures a series of distinctions such as those between citizen and foreigner, colonizer and colonized, and metropole and colony” (501).⁹ But if the Empire begins to blur the lines between “citizen and foreigner, colonizer and colonized,” then that “categorizing imperative” begins to break down; it then becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish those

identifications. This responsibility of identification falls on the English citizen who must establish both how to recognize Englishness and how to convey Englishness.

To distinguish oneself as English, one must distinguish what it is to be not-English, that is, to be foreign.¹⁰ Expressions of nationalist pride or nationalism, which Peter Alter defines as existing “whenever individuals feel they belong primarily to the nation, and whenever affective attachment and loyalty to that nation override all other attachments and loyalties” (9), establish a commonality between citizens. One is English because one is expressive of “affective attachment and loyalty” for England; these sentiments are, in Alter’s estimation, dependent on a feeling of national belonging. Linda Colley’s *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* sees this distinction between English and not-English as a result of the confrontation with “an obviously alien ‘Them’” which leads “an otherwise diverse community [to] become a reassuring or merely desperate ‘Us’” (6). In Colley’s estimation, this occurs for Britain in the period just prior to Queen Victoria’s reign.¹¹ The Victorian era inherits the larger crisis of national definition seen in the period during and just following the Napoleonic Wars; fears of invasion and the expansion of imperial forces are writ in Victorian novels as fears of social invasion and concerns over the expanding Empire.¹²

The response of the English people to this constantly shifting definition of Britishness that no longer represents physical proximity to England is a near-panicked attempt to establish standards not only for nation but also for gender. While it seems self-explanatory that nation constantly impacts its citizens’ lives, the same cannot be said that all of the nation’s citizens will have impact on it. The majority of England’s male

citizens, especially those who fit within the parameters of white middle-class masculinity prized by Victorian England, had the power to vocalize national concerns through the vote, through public office, or through authoring texts. Its female citizens, however, regardless of class, race, or education, often were relegated to a national impact that was only symbolic in resonance.¹³ Joanne Sharp's "Gendering Nationhood: A Feminist Engagement with National Identity" argues that "The female is a prominent *symbol* of nationalism and honour. But this is a symbol to be protected by masculine agency" (100, emphasis original). Without the agency to enact fully the responsibilities of a national citizen, Victorian women were held up as symbols, even national treasures, that the men had to protect and maintain; this symbolism was established through ideology that claimed to define what a "true" Englishwoman was. The Victorian era established the character of an Englishwoman in no small way through her rejection or obsession with dress. A "true" Englishwoman rejects fashion and thus rejects the potential manipulative powers of fashion.¹⁴ An overt "love of dress" is, as the author of *Dress* reminds us, disastrous to the wealth of a nation because it represents women's utilization of fashion. Englishness becomes definable not only by action but also by appearance, as *Photographs of Paris Life* argues, and thus Englishness in women becomes increasingly dependent on outward displays of fashion because fashionable dress is so recognizable and easily distinguishable. Further, more subtle descriptions of a character's attitude toward fashionable dress can help distinguish between "Us" and "Them." In order to distinguish between "Us" and "Them," Victorian novelists utilize

the “subtle pressure” of dress description that Hollander identifies. Details of dress, particularly fashionable dress, become markers of national distinction.

The continuous change that is the very definition of fashion parallels the expansion and contraction of England and the British Empire, and several Victorian novels detail how shifts in fashion and nation often are coupled. The popularity of the Indian shawl or women’s turbans, two foreign articles of clothing domesticated in England, reflect the Empire’s Eastern conquests, while the height of the crinoline and the decline of the corset, both associated with greater freedom of movement for women, represent the beginnings of the women’s rights movement. Exploring particular articles of women’s clothing like the Indian shawl, the crinoline, or the trousers helps us understand what is important to Victorian women during a time that often associated them with so-called “feminine weaknesses” like fashion. Fashion, as I argue, is not a weakness at all but rather a tool of extraordinary personal, social, and national power for women during a time that would deny them the majority access to all three arenas. Further, I argue that Victorian women did not only passively receive a national distinction of Englishness through their fashion and dress; they purposefully and decisively constructed an English or non-English self in order to convey their social, personal, or national power. Men’s clothing too speaks and conveys these forms of power. It can be national and fashionable, and it can be important and essential. But nineteenth-century England did not afford women the same rights, respect, or position within the establishment of the nation as it afforded its men. Women often were symbolic representations of nation; they could symbolize the importance of nation for

the nation itself, or could be representative of the larger concerns of the nation, but regardless of class or wealth, they were denied more substantial or concrete forms of power, most notably, the vote. I explore the understanding of fashion and nationalism in Victorian novels specifically through the presentation of women's clothing because, as I argue, women's dress, that feminine realm to which Victorian England dismissed its women, offers women an instrument with which to articulate the national and personal concerns their nation would not grant them. Victorian women thus break free from the association with national symbolism to instead employ agency in their enactment of national representation.

Understanding the usefulness of dress in the realities of everyday life, Victorian novelists utilize it in their fiction by presenting women concerned with dress and its national implications, or by manipulating the national implications of dress in order to influence readers' interpretations of characters. Whether playful or serious, gently mocking or completely sincere, many nineteenth-century novels present this concern over the expanding British Empire and the consequently contracting English nation by presenting characters continuously concerned with national distinctions. Hand in hand with concern over the expansion of the British Empire is the concern over the expansion of women's roles both in the home and in the public arena, and women's increasing visibility in both places. This exposure of women becomes for the nineteenth century best defined through their outward presentation of self, and dress is vital in that self's establishment. As the three epigraphs that begin this chapter demonstrate, fashion and dress are for nineteenth-century women about preference: preference over with what to

cover their bodies, over their outward presentations of real or fictional inner selves, and even over their allegiance to certain nationalist affiliations. Exploring these articles of women's clothing and, larger, women's concerns about and access to the fashionable arena in the novels of the period—through dress, through social standing, through prestige, and even through the construction and production of articles of clothing—is to see the concerns of the nation writ large in the entertainment of the nation. These concerns of fashion and nation are concerns of the general populace, of the people of England, of the women of England, written by some of the most popular novelists of Victorian England, through the vehicle of enjoyment and, as we understand the Victorian novel today, through the vehicle of social and political commentary as well.¹⁵

Exploring the Power of an “Interesting Feminine Weakness”: Chapter Summaries

By viewing together women's fashion and English nationalism in the novels and non-fictional texts of the Victorian era, I argue that dress and, in particular, fashionable dress is a powerful tool for women, and that authors present female characters who use dress to articulate complex, nuanced understandings of not only themselves but also of their role within the English nation at large. In Chapter II, ““That Wicked Paris’: Empire, Xenophobia, and Fashion in England,” I argue that Elizabeth Gaskell's 1853 novel *Cranford* uses dress to elucidate how the expanding British Empire sparks crises of authenticity back home in England, as the very definition of what it means to be English to the English themselves is exposed as arbitrary and insubstantial.¹⁶ In the novel, the expanding British Empire and the subsequent influence of foreign peoples and

nations are figured as an invasion of England, and the addition of countries to the British Empire is often featured as the invasion of England by the French. Figured not as a literal invasion and thus not as a war between armed men, the “French invasion” is figured as a symbolic invasion, and thus a war between fashionable women. In rejecting French fashions, the women of *Cranford* reject the redefinition of Englishness that includes more foreign ideals and ultimately, more foreign fashions and dress. Gaskell’s tongue-in-cheek portrayal of this rejection of foreign dress gently mocks the English anxieties over a foreign invasion and at the same time it helps to establish an overall argument for the perceived nationality of fashion and dress.

Like Gaskell, William Thackeray views the constant fear over the dilution of Englishness as a somewhat hysterical response to larger concerns of nation and empire on the part of his countrymen and women, and his 1848 novel *Vanity Fair* uses fashion to poke gentle fun at the constant construction of foreign women as obviously readable as not-English. In *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray pays particular attention to the national differences in women’s clothing and their attitudes toward dress in order to compare French-born Becky Sharp to English-born Amelia Sedley not only through personality but also through appearance. Chapter III, “Fashion Out of Place: Englishness Abroad, Foreignness at Home, and the Natural-Artificial Divide,” argues that the crises of authenticity demonstrated by *Cranford* are in *Vanity Fair* crises of recognition; if the Empire is expanding to include various peoples, then distinguishing the English from their foreign counterparts becomes increasingly more difficult. Thackeray examines the commonly held definitions that attempt to differentiate Frenchwomen from

Englishwomen through Frenchwomen's ability to dress, and dress well. As fashionable dress, oftentimes originating in France, becomes popular in England, fashionable dress is denigrated by Englishmen and women for demonstration of the artificial construction of nineteenth-century standards of beauty. This artificiality is in Thackeray's novel best portrayed by Becky Sharp as Frenchwomen become defined in England by their constructed beauty and style. Contrasting with the artificiality of Frenchwomen is the supposed naturalness of Englishwomen, as seen through Amelia Sedley, whose awkward inattention to the nuances of fashionable dress identifies her immediately as nationally English. I argue, however, that Thackeray's novel portrays "natural" beauty and style as just as constructed as more fashionable and thus seemingly "artificial" understandings of beauty and style in order to highlight the hypocrisy of a nation that is still influenced by foreign fashions and ideals.

One way to demonstrate the artificiality of fashion is to denigrate the women who understand how to use and manipulate dress. As I argue, fashionable dress is a tool of power for many nineteenth-century women, and as such, it can be viewed as detrimental to England's commonly held gender codes, beliefs, and ideals. The nineteenth-century's argument that a woman's love of fashion reflects a want of character and morality becomes so common that even women who work within the fashion industry as dressmakers, seamstresses, or milliners are seen as in danger of surrendering to fashion's and men's seductive sway. Chapter IV, "'The Will and Pleasure of Women': The Feminine Love of Fashion and England's Response," expands on the previous two chapters' arguments that women's understanding of and

appreciation for fashion and dress is in Victorian England written as excessive vanity or the antithesis of Englishness.¹⁷ In this chapter, I argue that some female writers like George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Harriet Martineau respond to these anxieties by presenting female characters whose love of fashion and dress is not detrimental to the ideals of English womanhood; rather, their love of fashion and dress becomes a celebration of the feminine power about which England is so anxious. Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) responds to Victorian discussions of prostitution and fallen women that claim fashion and dress are responsible for a woman's sexual fall. While Gaskell's text explores this claim through two characters, Mary Barton and her Aunt Esther, the text's sympathy for the two women counters the argument that a woman's love of finery will ultimately destroy the fabric of England, and cast the "wealth of a nation" into the "yawning gulf" *Dress* envisions. George Eliot's 1871-72 *Middlemarch* celebrates a woman's love and understanding of fashion by presenting two female characters, Rosamond Vincy and Dorothea Brooke, whose dichotomous natures would seemingly belie their similarity in their love of dress. *Middlemarch* celebrates the pure-intentioned Dorothea's love of clothing to argue that a selfless heroine like Dorothea can enjoy articles of dress and not experience a sexual or social fall. Eliot presents Dorothea's love of dress as purposefully contrary to contemporary fashion trends but nevertheless still beautiful and complimentary. I argue that this presentation of Dorothea's decisive understanding and use of dress to flatter and compliment herself and other women is Eliot's argument for the importance of fashion and dress in Englishwomen's lives.

The power of fashion is nowhere better seen than in the campaigns of the suffrage movement at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. My final chapter, “Women Who Did: The New Woman, Dress Reform, and the Suffrage Movement,” argues that fashion truly becomes a tool with which to convey English nationalism for the dress reformers, New Women, and Suffragettes during the end of the Victorian era. By using fashionable dress and, most specifically, commonly accepted costumes of national dress, these feminists protested their participation in a nation that heretofore was only symbolic. Through association with and thus identification by commonly held standards for feminine beauty, the militant and non-militant Suffragettes argued for their adherence to more traditional and accepted understandings of English womanhood. The novelists, too, used fashion to gain sympathy for their feminist female characters, by associating their fashions specifically with English manufacture and English standards of beauty. Grant Allen’s 1895 novel *The Woman Who Did* and H. G. Wells’s 1912 novel *Ann Veronica* offer characters who are politically and fashionably capable, and who are, despite their more radical politics, presented as conservative English heroines through their conventional and English dress.

In using fashion to convey standards of Englishness, Victorian novelists also use fashion to critique standards of English womanhood in a nation that denies women the opportunity to convey those standards through the same means their male citizen counterparts use. These novelists also use fashion and dress to celebrate women’s power in the arena of fashion, and to vent frustrations over the changing face of England or the changing standards for women. Fashion is an important and vital means of

communication and action for women, and the Victorian novel utilizes the understanding of fashion's readability, its ability to convey intentional or unintentional meaning, in order to best express the position of women and England in such a nebulous time.

Notes

¹ In *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, Elizabeth Wilson remarks on the strangeness of "Clothes without a wearer," and sees "A part of this strangeness of dress is that it links the biological body to the social being, and public to private. This makes it uneasy territory, since it forces us to recognize that the human body is more than a biological entity. It is an organism in culture, a culture artifact even, and its own boundaries are unclear" (2).

² Throughout her text, Chroniqueuse gives several examples of the unfashionable clothing of the Englishwomen she observes, only one of which is the following discussion of Englishwomen's color choices: "To some, one colour is becoming; to others it is not; this is what English girls should study. Purple bonnets, green dresses, and pink parasols, form a combination far from elegant. These varieties of colours seem to charm the rosy-cheeked English girls who abound in the streets of Paris. Why! I actually saw, the other day, walking on the Boulevard, an English lady, wearing a fine mauve velvet shawl, or rather mantle, with a yellow cotton fringe!" (157).

³ Georg Simmel understands fashion's constant change in no small way to be affected by class status; he sees "the latest fashions" as affecting "only the upper classes," and "as soon as the lower classes begin to copy [the upper classes' style]," the upper classes abandon that style "which in its turn differentiates them from the masses" (545). This theory that fashion begins with the upper classes and eventually works its way down to the lower or working classes is according to several theorists the "Trickle-Down Theory" of fashion (Davis 110).

⁴ For further information on the function of women's magazines in the nineteenth century, see Jeffrey A. Auerbach's "What They Read: Mid-Nineteenth Century English Women's Magazines and the Emergence of a Consumer Culture" and Margaret Beetham's *A Magazine of Her Own?: Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine, 1800-1914*. Also, *Victorian Women's Magazines: An Anthology* edited by Margaret Beetham and Kay Boardman offers an overview of the various types of women's magazines available in the nineteenth century.

⁵ In *Seeing Through Clothes*, Anne Hollander challenges the common understanding of the naked body as the natural body in her claim that the clothed body is just as natural, as people spend most of their time dressed rather than undressed (84).

⁶ I am in no small part indebted to the work of Nancy Armstrong. Upon first reading her work *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*, I was challenged to rethink my own notions regarding the public and private spheres of nineteenth-century women's lives. Armstrong argues that there is a "relationship between the sexual and the political," and that "political events cannot be understood apart from women's history, from the history of women's literature, or from changing representations of the household" (10). Dress is an intimate part of women's history and of the household; I argue that it is also an intimate part of women's involvement with their nation.

⁷ In *Fashion and Eroticism*, Valerie Steele defines fashion as "the prevailing mode of dress" that while encompassing "dress" is not solely defined by articles of clothing: "Dress (clothing) is common to most cultures, some form of bodily adornment (ornament) apparently to all; but fashion is generally considered to be a specific historical and geographical phenomenon that first appeared in Europe around the fourteenth century" (8). Elizabeth Wilson would agree with this, as she sees "Dress in general," both modern and historical, as fulfilling "a number of social aesthetic, and psychological functions," that changes with the rise of Western capitalism (3). This rise in Western capitalism brings about fashion as we know it today, which Wilson defines as "dress in which the key feature is rapid and continual changing of styles" (3).

⁸ In *National Identities and Travel in Victorian Britain*, Marjorie Morgan argues that "When touring the Continent, travellers from Britain typically deferred to this tendency to lump all people from the British Isles together as 'English'. Robert Louis Stevenson, for example, wrote at length about his Scottishness when in America, but nearly always identified himself as an 'Englishman' if talking with Europeans" (195). We can see a similar sentiment in England, as well, particularly when identifying all peoples from the British Isles as "English" is helpful in furthering a cause, like the women's suffrage movement.

⁹ In her article on Mary Seacole's *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands*, Poon discusses Englishness and its "irreducibly performative nature as discourse" (501, emphasis original).

¹⁰ My understanding of nation and nationalism is further indebted to Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* and Linda Colley's article "Britishness and Otherness: An Argument."

¹¹ Colley argues that “it was during this period that a sense of British national identity was forged, and that the manner in which it was forged has shaped the quality of this particular sense of nationhood and belonging ever since” (1).

¹² Patrick Parrinder’s *Nation and Novel: The English Novel from its Origins to the Present Day* offers an interesting discussion of what makes English novels particularly English, from the eighteenth century to the twentieth, and argues that “it is not merely coincidental that the English novel rose to prominence in the eighteenth century when Britain was fast becoming the centre of a world empire” (2). Parrinder in part sees literature in constant dialogue with Empire.

¹³ In *Britons*, Colley remarks on a parade in celebration of peace in 1814 England for which men and women dressed up as the Duke of Wellington and Britannia, John Bull and Mrs. Bull (237). Colley argues that parading Mrs. Bull “side by side with her ‘husband’, John Bull, suggested that the claims of women were coming to be recognised in this society in a new way. By participating as actors and not just as spectators in this victory procession [...] women proclaimed that they, too, were patriots who could make an active contribution to the nation’s welfare and progress” (237-38). Interestingly, “Mrs. Bull” is a woman identified as patriotic not only through her participation in the parade but also through her symbolic costume. While this celebration early in the century helps to establish women’s participation in nation, I argue that it is in their everyday dress and, most particularly, in their use of fashionable dress rather than their use of costume that allows women agency in their participation in nation and establishment of their nationalism for England. This use of costume, however, will become very useful for the Suffragettes and Suffragists at the end of the century. I will discuss the use of national dress further in Chapter V.

¹⁴ There are several texts that have been extraordinarily helpful in establishing my understanding of women and nation and women and empire. Deirdre David’s *Rule Britannia: Women, Empire, and Victorian Writing* examines writing about nation within the larger British empire and, in particular, “within this writing the nation about women, women themselves, of course, participated in its construction: sometimes in enthusiastic consonance with praise of Britannic rule, sometimes in a contrapuntal voice that speaks skeptically alongside the primarily androcentric voices that articulate ideal governance of the empire” (5). Bernard Porter’s *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society and Culture in Britain* understands that “nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British imperialism was not only ‘masculine’ in character, but also included some conventionally ‘feminine’ traits” but as these traits existed “without any input at all from the women, so far as we can judge” (292) those traits are more ideological constructions of gendered conventions. Susan Meyer’s work *Imperialism at Home: Race and Victorian Women’s Fiction* explores how Victorian women writers used the language of race as a way to access larger discussions of gender (7). Anne McClintock seems to

summarize the overall experience of gender and nationalism quite nicely by arguing that “All nationalisms are gendered, all are invented and all are dangerous” (352).

¹⁵ Several works examine the nationalist implications of fashion and dress. For the purposes of elucidation, I offer a list of those works that focus specifically on British or English fashion. Kristen Hoganson’s article “The Fashionable World: Imagined Communities of Dress” argues for nationalism in dress, particularly in early-twentieth-century America. Hoganson sees “the appeal of French fashion” in “the imagined community it implied, and this community stretched across national boundaries, uniting upper-crust consumers” (265). Alison Goodrum’s article “Land of Hip and Glory: Fashioning the ‘Classic’ National Body” explores twentieth-century British identities, particularly through recognizable British clothing like Burberry check which Goodrum calls “a national symbol” (85). Christopher Breward’s *Fashioning London: Clothing and the Modern Metropolis* looks specifically at the function of fashion within the London metropolis. The collection of essays, *The Englishness of English Dress*, edited by Christopher Breward, Becky Conekin, and Caroline Cox, offers essays on the historical and cultural implications of Englishness in dress. Valerie Steele’s *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History* offers an interesting contrast to Englishness in fashion by examining the origins of many English fashions in France.

¹⁶ The title, “That Wicked Paris,” is taken from Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Cranford* (39).

¹⁷ The title, “The Will and Pleasure of Women,” is taken from Harriet Martineau’s “A Real Social Evil” (33).

CHAPTER II

“THAT WICKED PARIS”: EMPIRE, XENOPHOBIA, AND FASHION IN ENGLAND

In her 1839 conduct tract *The Women of England*, Sarah Stickney Ellis argues that despite her growing concern over the lagging morality of her countrywomen, and therefore of England, she still believes,

the women of England are not surpassed by those of any other country for their clear perception of the right and the wrong of common and familiar things, for their reference to principle in the ordinary affairs of life, and for their united maintenance of that social order, sound integrity, and domestic peace, which constitute the foundation of all that is most valuable in the society of our native land. (36)

While Ellis notes that “The national characteristics of England are the perpetual boast of her patriotic sons” (9), she lays the foundation of the nation at the feet of its women rather than its men, as women are the maintainers of “social order, sound integrity, and domestic peace.” Ellis defines England and its ideals through its women, rather than all of its citizens. For Ellis, as for so many Victorian writers, women’s place lies not only in the home, a physical place of residence, but also in the Home, an ideology based on domestic pursuits and concerns particular to English society in their native homeland.¹ These domestic pursuits, “the home comforts, and fireside virtues for which [England] is so justly celebrated,” are “one of the noblest features in [England’s] national character” and more often than not are regarded “as within the compass of a woman’s

understandings and the province of a woman's pen" (9-10). In writing her conduct tract, Ellis takes up her own "woman's pen" and defines the national character of England by instructing Englishwomen what it is to be English.

Ellis's concern with the Englishness of her nation's women is reiterated throughout the instructional and fictional literature of the period; Victorian England, it seems, suffers under a crisis of national definition. This crisis of national definition, brought on by an influx of new peoples and ideas arriving in England from the burgeoning and expanding Empire, also embodies a larger concern regarding national authenticity.² This concern, more often than not, is debated through the figures of women and their roles in nation and Empire. As Ellis and other Victorian women writers such as Elizabeth Gaskell take up their pens to encourage women to conquer what they see as the flagging morality and pretenses of sophistication fracturing the nineteenth-century middle class, they use scenes of home and its domestic, feminine concerns such as fashion as microcosmic parallels for the larger domestic concerns of the nation itself. Further, as Ellis elevates Englishwomen above "those of any other country," she vocalizes the growing debate over what defines Englishness and, in particular, the influence of foreign countries over English culture. Asserting the importance of the middle class, Ellis writes, "It is not therefore from the aristocracy of the land that the characteristics of English women should be taken; because the higher the rank, and the greater the facilities of communication with other countries, the more prevalent are foreign manners, and modes of thinking and acting common to that class of society in other countries" (13-14). In seeing the aristocracy as continental, and

therefore influenced by “foreign manners, and modes of thinking and acting,” Ellis establishes the middle class as the nation’s authentic representation of Englishmen and Englishwomen because she believes that the middle class defines Englishness through its active attempts to conquer the flagging morality of the nation.

In these continuous attempts to define the national character of her country, Ellis devotes particular attention not only to actions but also to signals of nationalism.³ For Ellis, an Englishwoman’s loyalty to her country is evident not only in the services that she performs but also in the image that she presents. A woman’s manners and social interactions are for Ellis best displayed through an Englishwoman’s presentation of herself. Ellis argues that if a woman, despite all appearances of accomplishments and outward displays of finery, were to reveal “underneath her graceful drapery, the soiled hem, the tattered frill,” those private items of dress that call to mind “her dressing room, her private habits,” then those same soiled and tattered items most likely would reflect “her inner mind, where, it is almost impossible to believe that the same want of order and purity does not prevail” (96). For Ellis, that soiled hem of a dress, therefore, indicates a soiled and slatternly mind; this revelation of the private calls to mind other, secret, private things. Yet by noticing that soiled hem and thereby judging women by their outward appearances, Ellis is placing importance on the very thing on which she warns her countrywomen not to place importance: dress. For Ellis, the attention a woman devotes to her dress distracts her from fulfilling her role as the daughter, wife, or mother of her country’s men; yet a disregard for dress—that soiled hem of which Ellis warns—signals disregard for the continuous representation of true and good Englishness

through neat and pretty dress. In short, Ellis argues that authentic Englishwomen, those defined by selfless loyalty to the nation, its peoples, and its ideals, should not become distracted by dress or its meanings; natural style and aptitude for dress, therefore, signal authenticity to the English middle class. In the framework that Ellis creates, Englishwomen are judged both by their outward appearances and by the very attention they pay to those outward appearances.

It is through their fashion that women are often judged as spectacles, and Ellis creates a framework in which women's fashion becomes an important marker of their internal selves. Fashion, defined for these purposes as stylish, trendy, and ornamental dress, so often is viewed as the outward marker of a woman's inner self, and thereby becomes the signal of a woman's worth. Diana Crane argues that the visibility of clothing and its conspicuous consumption construct an immediate identity in the social world (1). Fashion's direct recognition by its viewers and its ability to be "read" signal a readability of fashion that few, if any, can escape. Further, fashion's role in creating an economic or class identity is completely artificial and immediately recognizable; Crane argues that dress, its fabrics, its accessories, its use of color and style, convey a recognizable class status (50). Dress articulates class status; it can also articulate nationality.⁴ As advancements in technology and marketing allow for a democracy of dress in the nineteenth century, corresponding crises of authenticity, both class and national, come into play. The attention women pay to their toilette, then, is more than the distraction from patriotism that Ellis suggests; instead as Englishwomen are read as middle-class or not, as moral or not, they are read as English or not, patriotic or not, as

well. As England expands its Empire and thus redefines the meaning of “British,” it becomes even more important to confirm and support the ideal of “true” Englishness as the nation encounters these crises of authenticity.

I begin with Sarah Stickney Ellis because she marks the beginning of Victoria’s reign, and writes of ideologies that will come to represent the best of the Victorians, to the Victorians themselves. Ellis’s early manners text can be seen as a prototype for several of the manners texts to follow, including those that deal with women and fashion.⁵ But also, Ellis is representative of a line of thinking that declares that the women of the nation, and not its men, are responsible for the nation’s successes and failures. Tamar Mayer argues that in many nationalistic narratives, “the nation is virtually always feminized and characterized as in need of protection; women are figured as the biological and cultural reproducers of the nation” (10). While this may be true of many nationalistic narratives, *The Women of England* differs because it focuses on women as the protectors of the nation, rather than merely its biological or cultural reproducers. When Ellis charges her readers with the plea, “You have deep responsibilities, you have urgent claims; a nation’s moral wealth is in your keeping” (13), she is placing the moral development of a nation directly in the hands of its women. The men of England may physically protect its borders and answer the imperial call for the expansion of the Empire, but the women of England preserve its integrity, its mission, and, in truth, its ideals.

We see a similar sentiment in Elizabeth Gaskell’s 1853 novel *Cranford* and the nearly-all-female community it presents. The women in *Cranford*—like the women on

whom Ellis places the responsibility for the moral wealth of an entire nation and, by extension, the British Empire—are responsible for creating, establishing, and maintaining the culture and morality of their provincial town. As they are women and therefore concerned with so-called feminine things, fashion, dress, and shopping become the markers of nationality and the signals of cultural cohesion by which the Cranfordians form their inclusive community. This community becomes, by extension, representative of national community as well. As England’s Empire expands across the globe, identifiers of “nation” and “English” become blurred. England’s cultural and social war with France, especially as it is represented in Gaskell’s novel, is in itself a microcosm of a larger crisis of national authenticity; “France” and “French fashions” personify foreignness for England during its time of Empire and expansion, and women are charged with the protection of the symbolic borders that separate England and France. This protection, more often than not, occurs within the fashionable arena, as it does in *Cranford*. Elizabeth Gaskell recognizes this seriousness on the part of her countrywomen and uses *Cranford* to mock, albeit gently, England’s seemingly overwhelming crisis of authenticity. Through the fashionable commentary presented through the eyes and pen of fashion-savvy narrator Mary Smith, *Cranford* understands Cranford’s need to cling to a sense of Englishness, particularly in matters of dress and fashion, as a nation’s need to cling to a sense of a definitive national character.

The Preservation of Englishness: Empire and Gaskell

Elizabeth Gaskell's novels often present women concerned with fashion—its manufacturing, its social resonance, its cultural capital—but in most of her works, these concerns are superseded by, indeed, sacrificed to, representations of sexuality, innocence, and seduction. *Mary Barton* (1848), *Ruth* (1853), and *Wives and Daughters* (1864-66) all present the seductive power of fabric, and the connection drawn between seamstresses and moral issues. But in *Cranford*, Gaskell instead uses fashion to demonstrate how the burgeoning British Empire is redefining the people and the identity of England, and the subsequent effects on the Englishwomen who reside in their native land.⁶ Cannon Schmitt posits that provincial novels like *Cranford* “domesticate the imperial, naturalizing territorial aggression within the provincial settings of realistic narrative” (16). Underneath the domestic talk of tea trays, lace, turbans, and shawls of *Cranford*'s female citizens, referred to as Amazons,⁷ lies a disturbing threat of imminent transformation and infiltration of the English countryside by outside, foreign forces as the townsfolk attempt to protect their ways of life against the encroaching ravages of time and change, and of the “territorial aggression” that is at the heart of the British Empire. As England's Empire grows, so, too, does its number of citizens, both at home and in the colonies abroad. The British Empire's advances into foreign nations inevitably bring foreign goods and people back to the seat of imperialism, England. With these military advances across the globe and their return to England, we begin to see a dual-imperial occupation: foreign citizens invade the seat of Empire while English citizens invade foreign countries, blurring national distinctions on both sides.

Often invoked as a novel of nostalgia, innocence, and “pastoral charm” (Cass 418), *Cranford* seems to represent the best, and last, of the small English town. Jeffrey Cass argues that Gaskell’s attention to the seemingly insignificant and quirky details of life in the town, which both he and Gaskell refer to as “Cranfordisms” (Cass 417), are in fact representations of the Cranford women’s desperate attempt to cling to an era gone by. This bygone era, pre-Empire, pre-mass transportation, and pre-mass consumption, evokes a nostalgic simplicity that belies the drastic shifts in culture that occur throughout the novel. Captain Brown’s death both by train and by modern literature, Miss Matty’s bankruptcy, and the infiltration of Cranford by turban-wearing Englishmen masquerading as Italians counter the Cranfordians’ disregard for technological, social, cultural, and fashionable shifts taking place throughout the novel’s timeframe. As Cranford seemingly resists change to its fashions, its people, and its pastoral and innocent way of life, it is in fact participating in the rapid changes to the same that are spreading across England. Cranford’s desperate hold on its nostalgic charm cannot protect it from outside forces. Instead, it becomes a pretense of encapsulation; Cranford, like many small towns across the nation, cannot withstand the assault of modernization. This modernization is a direct result of imperial progress and of the vast advances in technology and shifts in gender politics that bring the Empire home to Cranford. There are few middle-class men in Cranford because many of them are dead, abroad, or consumed with military obligations.⁸ Cranford is changing, despite its best efforts: the town would not be so wholly female if the Empire was not so wholly in need of able-bodied men.

Like William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848), *Cranford* presents the effects of Empire on nations and their peoples not through detailed discussions of invading military forces but rather through scenes that instead deal almost exclusively with "the ladies, and the baggage" (Thackeray 346). Both novels understand that to see the results of war and conquering armies, one must not look to the scene of war but instead to the women and their effects left behind. Thackeray's novel accounts for its domestic setting by arguing, "We do not claim to rank among the military novelists. Our place is with the non-combatants" (346), while Gaskell's accounts for the lack of men with a subtle warning. Mary Smith, the narrator, begins her tale:

In the first place, Cranford is in possession of the Amazons; all the holders of houses, above a certain rent, are women. If a married couple come to settle in the town, somehow the gentleman disappears; he is either fairly frightened to death by being the only man in the Cranford evening parties, or he is accounted for by being with his regiment, his ship, or closely engaged in business all the week in the great neighbouring commercial town of Drumble, distant only twenty miles on a railroad. In short, whatever does become of the gentlemen, they are not at Cranford. What could they do if they were there? (1)

This introduction serves as a warning and, to a certain extent, a threat to England and its Empire through the ambiguous description of the disappearing gentleman, as well as the suggestion that he is "frightened to death" in a female-exclusive social world—and that the women are actively engaged in the frightening. But in setting the scene of her novel

with such a colorful and explicit introduction, Gaskell also implicates progress in eliminating men from the English countryside. The men are “accounted for” in their regiment, on their ship, or in their commercial enterprises readily accessible by rail. The novel notes that there is no longer a need for men in Cranford, for indeed, “What could they do if they were there?” and argues that the sacrifice of men to the greater technological and imperial good will result in female exclusivity. In short, the town is going to the women.

By establishing female exclusivity, *Cranford* establishes its concern with feminine affairs; because the town is in possession of the Amazons, the town must be concerned with Amazonian things. And as fashion is relegated to women because so often it is marketed and directed specifically to women, Cranford’s interest in fashion is seen as a “natural” feminine interest. The first discussions of fashion in *Cranford* concern cultural belatedness. The townswomen are seemingly obliviousness to fashion trends, a fact that would be laughable if that obliviousness was not actually a conscious refusal of change. After declaring Cranford an Amazon town, Mary tells us that the “last gigot, the last tight and scanty petticoat in wear in England, was seen in Cranford—and seen without a smile” (2). Mary Smith serves as both narrator and anthropological observer in this novel; she records the oddities, quirks, and eccentricities of Cranford for a more elegant and fashionable audience in London. In part, Mary’s wry and amused observations about these Cranfordisms, the “last gigot” and “the last tight and scanty petticoat in wear in England,” help to highlight this transitional period in England. Through Mary, Gaskell details the more provincial or outdated fashions, as well as the

more provincial attitudes and beliefs, for a more cosmopolitan reading audience that will recognize the clothing of Cranford as unfashionable, but be too charmed by Cranford's Amazons to form any judgment other than an amused one.

The excuse given in the novel for this lack of fashionability is "elegant economy," and because the majority of the town exists in "general but unacknowledged poverty" (3), pinching pennies becomes a fashion in itself. It is also the result of pure contrariness.⁹ Despite the fact that their "dress is very independent of fashion," the women of Cranford wonder, "What does it signify how we dress here at Cranford, where everybody knows us?" when they are home, and "What does it signify how we dress here, where nobody knows us?" when they are away (2). These statements suggest not that Cranford's citizens are oblivious to current fashions, but rather that they are quite conscious of them, enough to recognize their "independence" in dress and their decision to ignore current trends. In fact, Mary's note that "The materials of their clothes are, in general, good and plain" (2) suggests that the Amazons do desire to maintain some modicum of "good" dress. To be fashionable in nineteenth-century England not only is to be aware of the latest fashion trends, but also to wear material recognizable by all classes as "good." The Cranford Amazons are aware of the fashions, and while they are provincially slightly behind the current trends, they are decisively choosing to wear their out-of-date clothes. This access to "materials [...] good and plain" in fact separates the Amazons from lower-class women who may have access to dress patterns, but would not have access, certainly, to the better and thus more expensive fabrics with which to make dresses themselves. Further, Mary's observation proves that the Amazons understand

the implications good dress has in society.¹⁰ The citizens of Cranford have turned their “elegant economy” of dress and the “cultural belatedness” of their fashions into a fashion statement of their own: quirky and independent, albeit dowdy and quaint, yet always middle-class.

Somewhat mockingly, *Cranford* romanticizes earlier times, and it presents its characters’ refusal to follow fashion trends as eccentric and as patriotic. In her 1879 study *Dress*, Margaret Oliphant observes that the decline of English principles is, in some part, a direct result of the nation’s obsession with the fluctuating world of fashion.

In dress, as in other things, English society has passed under that wave of new impulse which has so much changed the appearance of our houses, the arrangement of our interiors, and even the texture and fashion of our manufactures. That which we wore placidly, or even with a little complaisance and sense of superior good taste, twenty years ago would fill us with alarm and terror now. The change which has taken place is more than a change of fashion, it is a change of principle. (1-2)

Oliphant speaks directly to her countrymen and women in this text, and speaks of the changes to “our houses,” “our interiors,” and “our manufactures.” Oliphant’s call back to “twenty years ago” when Englishwomen wore earlier styles “placidly, or even with a little complaisance and sense of superior good taste” is paralleled in Gaskell’s novel.

Oliphant romanticizes a time twenty years earlier as does Gaskell; although *Cranford* is written in 1853, the setting is around twenty years before, in the 1830s. This longing for things past is a longing for a fictional construction of a slower, more even-paced time, as

the fear of change is a fear of modernization. Oliphant pays particular attention to the modulation of her contemporary England, and “that wave of new impulse” overwrites any “sense of superior good taste” as Englishwomen (and men¹¹) succumb to the sway of rapidly changing and ever-shifting fashion trends. The impulsiveness of fashion is treated as a sentient, roving entity that overcomes its victims and coerces them into a frenzy of action: they change the external and internal look of their homes, and themselves. By harkening back to outmoded fashions, and insisting on “elegant economy” in dress, the Amazons resist this frenzy of action, and retain, then, the principle of which Oliphant speaks.

Mary Smith faithfully records this resistance to change and presents a sympathetic, though witty and gently mocking, view of the Amazons’ plight. When she presents an image of a tiny spinster attempting to secure her children under a large red silk umbrella, she asks the reader, “Have you any red silk umbrellas in London?” (2). This question serves three purposes in the narration. First, it offers a contrast between the charmingly unfashionable Cranfordians and the more sophisticated reading public in London. Second, it proves that Mary herself knows that such things are not seen in London and are therefore woefully out of style. This demonstrates Mary’s know-how and innate sense of fashion, two things that will reiterate themselves over and over again in the text. And third, it illuminates the difference between Mary and the Cranfordians, and notes that she exists both as a theoretical outsider who infiltrates Cranford and as an accepted member of the town. Rowena Fowler reminds us of Mary’s in-betweenness; she notes that Mary, in her existence between Cranford and “the nearby manufacturing

town of Drumble, is sometimes too influenced by the matter-of-factness of the latter to appreciate the roundabout logic of the former” (720). But it is this very in-betweenness that allows Mary not only to describe the details of the Amazonian town but also to nudge Cranford towards its pending assimilation into the British Empire. In fact, Mary often prompts change in Cranford: she knows the shifting fashions in dining and clothing, she helps Miss Matty open her tea shop, and she brings Peter, Miss Matty’s brother, home to England from India. In this sense, then, Mary becomes an agent of modernization who helps to assimilate Cranford not only into the larger cultural hegemony of an England changed by Empire, but also to the technological, fashionable, and social shifts that have begun to find their ways into the town.

Empire often appears in Gaskell’s novel, but through the novel’s presentation of the materials and goods that Empire brings to England and rarely through the presentation of the more bloody conquests happening abroad. Miss Matty’s brother’s flight from Cranford, however, demonstrates the harsher realities of the Empire. Peter, like those men who have nothing to do in Cranford, abandons the town after the realization that it can offer nothing to a young man such as himself. And, like so many other such men without recourse or opportunity, Peter enlists in the Navy. Miss Matty tells Mary, “He had made his way to Liverpool; and there was war then; and some of the king’s ships lay off the mouth of the Mersey; and they were only too glad to have a fine likely boy such as him (five foot nine he was) come to offer himself” (56). Miss Matty’s language is one of regret and longing for the loss of her brother; it is also imperial and reverential. She speaks of war, and king’s ships, and of the offering, or, perhaps in this

case, the sacrifice of a young boy “they were only too glad to have.” Peter is caught up in this imperial fever, as well, as his letter home to his mother indicates. His language is naïvely expectant about war and filled with patriotic fervor: “Mother! we may go into battle. I hope we shall, and lick those French” (57).¹² But Peter’s mother, rather than Peter, dies, and the day after her death, “came a parcel for her from India—from her poor boy. It was a large, soft white India shawl, with just a little narrow border all round; just what my mother would have liked” (58). The importance of this shawl is not in the giving of it, but rather in its cultural resonance. Peter does not merely send “just what [his] mother would have liked,” but rather what all mothers would have liked: the symbolic return of the prodigal son, now wealthy and influential, who brings with him items of conquest and Empire. In the nineteenth century, the Indian shawl was often a gift given to female family members upon return from the East.¹³ Peter, not yet at the conclusion of his imperial career, sends it while still away, thus breaking the symbolism of his act. With Peter’s act, the shawl can represent Empire, but it cannot represent successful conquest.

Like so many items of clothing in the nineteenth century, this Indian shawl is more than a fashionable accessory: it is a symbol of Empire and the colonization of the East. But further, possession of such shawls is assurance of respectability for Englishwomen; the price, accessibility, and quality of Indian shawls, particularly those made in the region of Kashmir, guarantee that only the wealthy can afford them.¹⁴ Contemporary Victorian magazines reinforce the shawl’s popularity in Britain, and its market value in the world of fashion. *The Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine* of

October 1870 notes that “Shawls are daily resuming their forever importance in the world of *elegantes*, and we must all have an Indian shawl if we would avoid the unlucky fate of the unfortunate lady who is confined to the house when it is windier than usual, because her shawl is not Indian” (as quoted in Chaudhuri 234). The language of this passage assumes a familiar reader, one who could or would afford a true Indian shawl: made of the warmer wool from Kashmir as opposed to the more domestic wool from northern English manufacture. Further, the shawl becomes a fashionable imperative. The fact that the women “must all have an Indian shawl” drives the piece; even if a woman did not want a shawl before, she would now. A shawl that is “not Indian” is just an article of dress; a shawl that is Indian is a fashionable garment. But the passage also implies the mobility the Indian shawl affords to Victorian women. The proper shawl acts as a buffer between a woman’s body and the elements; or, the shawl protects the private from the public. The active gaze of the public audience that would confine a woman to her home “because her shawl is not Indian” denotes the shawl as a necessary article of clothing. The author suggests that without the proper shawl, a woman would be exposed both to the elements and to the prying eyes of the fashionable “*elegantes*.” Without an *Indian* shawl, the author argues, warmer and more practical for English falls and winters, a woman’s health would be in greater danger.

Fashion demands the shawl’s authenticity; in order to be fashionable, one must own an original Kashmir. By owning shawls made in India, Victorian women participated in the global marketplace. They consumed foreign objects, and gained a sense of exoticism in the process. The Kashmir shawl occupies a liminal space in

England; because of its visibility and its foreign design, it is both public and exotic, and because of its connection to the body and its attractiveness in the domestic arena, it is both private and English. Suzanne Daly remarks that such shawls “are ubiquitous in the domestic novels of the time where [...] they function at once as a marker of respectable English womanhood and as magic and mysterious ‘oriental’ garments” (238).¹⁵ The giving and possessing of the shawl, then, become signifiers both of respectable Englishness for its wearer and its bearer: for the man, it represents his part in his nation’s conquest and management of foreign lands, and for the woman, the class position and global awareness provided to her by successful male family members. When a man brought back the shawl from India to England, he proclaimed his reinstatement into English society. Daly notes, “Thus the shawl becomes a kind of ritual of casting-off for the returning man—he restores himself to England and to Englishness” (248). For Peter, the shawl represents his accomplishments as an English gentleman. Peter’s gift of the shawl is an attempt to restore his legacy; the gift is for his mother, but its arrival should bear significance to the Cranford community at large. Therefore the “double life” of the shawls and their “functioning at once as exotic foreign artifacts and as markers of proper Englishness” (Daly 237) can actually be expanded to a triple life when one takes gender into consideration. The shawls become markers of proper Englishness for both men and women, for both Peter and his mother.

But the Indian or Kashmir shawl, like so many fashionable accoutrements, gained its popularity in France before it spread to England. Sarah Buie notes that “After Napoleon presented Josephine with a Kashmir shawl given him during his Egyptian

campaign (1798-1801), not only did the garment become increasingly popular with fashionable European women, but its forms and construction came to reflect drastic economic changes” (45) both for its wearers and its makers.¹⁶ For those in possession of authentic Kashmir shawls recognizable by their unique wool and pattern,¹⁷ their social and economic worth were displayed, very publicly, on their bodies, as the hand production of the shawl and rarity of the wool assured its expense. Further, the popularity of these shawls sparked a desire in European textile manufacturers to create their own shawls, and thus to capitalize on the vast economic worth of the shawls and what they represented (Buie 48), eventually leading up to the creation of the Paisley shawl,¹⁸ originating in the city of Paisley, Great Britain (Buie 49).¹⁹ This domestication of a foreign object is tripled: a French fashion becomes English, an Indian production is moved home, and a foreign fashion becomes simply part of the daily English dress. Part of this domestication is due to “the way that the textiles’ gradual movement into the beds and onto the bodies of the English is figured as an ‘invasion’” at its burgeoning point of popularity (Daly 237-38). The shawl, a popular and seemingly necessary fashion accessory, becomes an intimate one, as well, as women wear it close to their bodies, and even sleep wrapped in one. This invasion must be countered by English ideals: the respectability the garment earns among the middle class and thus the class demarcations it attempts to represent, its symbolism as an object of successful imperial conquest, and its gender politicking among Englishmen and women alike.

Perhaps the most famous example of the Indian shawl in Gaskell’s work is its cameo appearance in the first chapter of her 1854-55 novel, *North and South*. The

shawl's first appearance in the narrative is in conversation. Aunt Shaw discusses Edith's trousseau with Mrs. Gibson, and notes the heirloom quality of these precious items: "I have spared no expense in her trousseau [...]. She has all the beautiful Indian shawls and scarfs the General gave to me, but which I shall never wear again" (9). Although the shawls are handed down, they are not considered cast-offs but rather inheritances. Their expense and significance in Victorian society warrant that Edith's trousseau is very well stocked indeed. Edith's mother not only is passing down important family artifacts, but solidifying her daughter's wealth and class position as well.²⁰ The contrast of this symbol of wealth is most notably seen in Mrs. Gibson's next statement about her own daughter: "Helen had set her heart upon an Indian shawl, but really when I found what an extravagant price was asked, I was obliged to refuse her. She will be quite envious when she hears of Edith having Indian shawls" (9). The implication of lower economic and class status is evident; while Helen has her heart set on just one shawl, and is refused, Edith will be in possession of several.

When Margaret is asked to bring the shawls and model them for her aunt and her friend, she is transformed by them into "a princess" (11). The association with the royal court—and, more generally, with royalty—is one of empire and colonization as it brings to mind Victoria, Queen of England and Empress of India. When "Margaret went down laden with shawls, and snuffing up their spicy Eastern smell" (11), Gaskell evokes the origin of the garments by presenting their very foreignness. They smell not of the English home in which they preside, but rather of the place of their origin. The "spicy Eastern smell" is a physical sense that invades Margaret's body; the scent travels into

her, and once she dons the shawls, her transformation into this foreign-draped “princess” is a complete one. As Margaret stands “quite silent and passive, while her aunt adjusted the draperies” (11), she is moved around bodily to best display the garments. As she is, “she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror over the chimney-piece, and smiled at her own appearance there—the familiar features in the usual garb of a princess” (11). The shawls are better suited for “Margaret’s tall, finely made figure” than for the cousin for whom they are intended, and Margaret’s black mourning gown “set off the long beautiful folds of the gorgeous shawls that would have half-smothered Edith” (11). By wearing these shawls, Margaret becomes both the proper Englishwoman displaying the spoils of empire, and the exotic Other swathed in spicy-scented fabrics. Margaret exists in a liminal state as she is both same and Other, both English and foreign.

But it is the shawls’ sensuous quality that truly invades Margaret and transforms her; the smell of the shawls invades the body of the Englishwoman, and their tactile sensation overwhelms her:

She touched the shawls gently as they hung around her, and took a pleasure in their soft feel and their brilliant colours, and rather liked to be dressed in such splendour—enjoying it much as a child would do, with a quiet pleased smile on her lips. Just then the door opened, and Mr. Henry Lennox was suddenly announced. Some of the ladies started back, as if half-ashamed of their feminine interest in dress. (11)

Margaret’s impulse to touch the fabrics is perhaps sparked by the women’s arranging of her: the fabric wants touch, wants sensation, and to best display the fabric, Margaret’s

body must be touched as well. The ladies' half-shame over their "feminine interest" in dress at Mr. Lennox's arrival is not solely dependent on the invasion of a man into their all-female environment; they are not ashamed to be caught being interested in dress, but rather, are ashamed to be caught experiencing and enjoying the sensuousness of dress, fabric, and drapery. Mr. Lennox tries to dismiss their frivolous women's concerns by telling Margaret, "I suppose you are all in the depths of business—ladies' business I mean. Very different to my business, which is the real true law business. Playing with shawls is very different work to drawing up settlements" (12). But Margaret defends their "ladies' business": "I knew how you would be amused to find us all so occupied in admiring finery. But really Indian shawls are very perfect things of their kind" (12). This masculine dismissal of a woman's interest in fashion as "playing" contrasts sharply with the real work fashion does in this scene. The shawls, while seemingly mere feminine accoutrements, are symbols of wealth, power, prestige, and, above all, the British Empire. The "ladies' business" of "playing with shawls" in fact demonstrates and displays the power and wealth of Edith's family to both the reader and to the women for whom Margaret models. When Margaret states that "really Indian shawls are very perfect things of their kind," she is, in fact, correct: they are perfect representations of conquest and Englishness.

The shawl's symbolic resonance as an object of wealth, of Empire, and of Englishness is demonstrated in *Cranford* as well as in *North and South*. In *Cranford* specifically, the shawl reveals that the Amazons do care about fashion, and in particular, expensive articles of fashion. Mrs. Jenkyns is buried in the shawl Peter sends home,

even though Miss Matty wonders, “perhaps it was not reasonable, but what could we do or say?” (58). The “unreasonableness” of burying her mother in the shawl directly concerns the wealth and status that the shawl represents; shawls were often heirlooms, passed from mother to daughter as they are in *North and South*, and perhaps the possession of such expensive fashionable items would have eased her burdens when Miss Matty’s finances declined. The shawl transforms Mrs. Jenkyns as it does Margaret; Miss Matty notes that she “looked so lovely” and much younger, and once they “decked her in the long soft folds; she lay, smiling, as if pleased” when “all Cranford came” to see her (58). This shawl, “just such a shawl as she wished for when she was married, and her mother did not give it her” (58) has found its appropriate home at last. It would not have been as appropriate should she have received the shawl from her mother, and its significance would not have been as complex; its function as an object of Empire and nation would not have existed had it not come from Peter while he was promoting the cause of the British Empire in India.

The Indian shawl is just one of the many imperial fashions valued in Cranford; in fact, *Cranford* would not be so concerned with so-called insignificant details if the Amazons were not so in need of so-called trivial things. The desire for fabrics, clothing, tea, and other such domestic articles opens Cranford to a market economy that is dependent on both domestic and international goods during a time when Cranford itself is becoming more domestic and international at the same time.²¹ The articles bought, traded, desired, and revered in the town are, for Cranford, as for so many other English towns clinging to English nationalism, non-English, or foreign, in nature. Further,

“foreign” in Cranford often denotes “French,” as France comes to represent the worst, and best, of fashion to Englishwomen.

“National Madness”²²: The Social War between England and France

Many of the more popular items of dress of this time originate in France, and therefore for some Englishmen and women, fashion and France are inextricably connected. By its very definition, fashion is marked by constant change, by new trends, lines, and ideas, and this ever-changing nature of fashion is for nineteenth-century England inextricably connected with France and its people. To Englishwomen such as Cranford’s Amazons, France represents the best of fashion—the latest styles, the boldest lines—and the worst of fashion—its signal of vanity, its constant change, its costly sway. This dichotomy echoes throughout the nineteenth century, and many writers try to stress the importance of a neat and fashionable appearance while, at the same time, they try to disassociate English fashions from their French origins and thus Englishwomen from French influence.

In such an attempt of disassociation, in her 1868 essay “The Girl of the Period,” Eliza Lynn Linton, like Ellis before her, bemoans the loss of the “true” Englishwoman, and claims that the new Englishwoman “whose dress is the object of such thought and intellect as she possesses” (356) “has already paid too much—all that once gave her distinctive national character” (358). The paragons who came before the girl of the period were “the ideal of womanhood; to us, at least, of home birth and breeding” (356), and to call someone an Englishwoman “meant a creature generous, capable, and modest;

something franker than a Frenchwoman, more to be trusted than an Italian, as brave as an American but more refined, as domestic as a German and more graceful” (356).

Linton’s litany of oppositions, “franker than a Frenchwoman,” “more to be trusted than an Italian,” immediately sets forth an opposition between what Linda Colley defines as “Them” versus “Us” (*Britons* 6).²³ For Linton, Englishwomen’s current interest in fashion has led to a decline in Englishwomen’s morality; this “national madness” over fashion is considered a fleeting phase which the citizens of England must wait out until it passes and “our women have come back again to the old English ideal, once the most beautiful, the most modest, the most essentially womanly in the world” (360).

For Linton, a woman’s interest in fashion is connected directly to the influence of France, and she blames that nation for the changing nature of Englishwomen. In her essay “Nearing the Rapids,” published in 1894, she claims that Englishwomen are becoming more French, with disastrous results. As women become more interested in fashion and politics and less interested in domestic and familial concerns, and as “the rule of woman has begun, and the men have to tail off behind the petticoat, we shall be more French than the French themselves, with irresponsible empresses pressing on disastrous wars” (379). Linton directly connects an interest in French fashions with revolutionary concerns, and, in particular, the dominance of untrustworthy women in positions of national power; she seems, for the moment, to forget that Victoria herself was an empress. Yet Linton believes that if England’s people continue on their same path, then perhaps all empresses will become “irresponsible”; Victoria would then perhaps follow suit and become one of these “irresponsible empresses” who will weaken

England's men, its government, and its citizens. Shooting guns, smoking in the streets, and dressing in a masculine style, these "queens of society [...] fashion the manners and decide the standard of morality of that society, [...] from the cut of a sleeve to the subjects permitted to be discussed at the five o'clock tea" (378), all of which, according to Linton, is "disastrous to the nation on every side" (385). Like Ellis's, Linton's diatribe against the decline of English morality is dependent solely on the nation's women.²⁴ Unlike Ellis, Linton does not call England's women to arms; rather, she views her countrywomen as representations of nation rather than its protectors.²⁵

By viewing women as the passive representations of nation rather than its active protectors, Linton disavows any agency for women's participation in and construction of national identity. Further, Linton insists that the adoption of French styles, manners, and fashions among the women of England and thus their transformation into Frenchwomen themselves divorces Englishwomen from any active construction of self. Existing merely as facsimiles of Frenchwomen, the Englishwomen Linton describes have no connection with nation or self, and further, are connected with those undesirables, the prostitutes. Because the Girl of the Period dyes her hair and paints her face, she imitates the courtesan ("Girl" 356), and "This imitation of the demi-monde in dress leads to something in manner and feeling, not quite so pronounced perhaps, but far too like to be honourable to herself or satisfactory to her friends" (358). Those women who imitate the demi-monde in their fashion trends and style will, according to Linton, eventually imitate the demi-monde in "manner and feeling," as well, but the association of fashion with both France and prostitution does not end there. Valerie Steele reminds us that

“French dominance in women’s fashion dates from the seventeenth century, when France was the most powerful European state and the French court the most prestigious” and that “English hostility toward things French may have played a role in their greater reservations about new fashion—designed, as the English were fond of saying, by Frenchmen for the Parisian demi-monde” (*Fashion and Eroticism* 7). Therefore, Linton’s concern about Englishwomen dressing like courtesans is representative of the anxieties over the immoral sway fashion held over its women, and, further, over women’s blind acquiescence to the regulations of fashion and dress, as seemingly dictated by French designers. France’s reign over the world of fashion caused some Englishmen and women to wonder whether France’s influence over Englishwomen’s dress could lead to France’s influence over Englishwomen’s thoughts, behaviors, manners, and morality. Linton’s concern over the English becoming “more French than the French themselves” speaks directly to a national hysteria over foreign invasion not only on land, but also in thought, deed, and action.

Further, France’s former position of political power which until the eighteenth century was maintained by aristocratic elites now is a reminder of England’s own concerns of anarchy, shifting class boundaries, and above all else, social and political revolution.²⁶ Oliphant describes fashion as an “impulse” that overcomes men and women and impedes their rational thought; this takes away the common notion of fashion’s sentience and instead makes fashion the reason for group rather than individual thought. This image of impulse and irrationality, best figured as mob rule, is complemented by an 1885 work *The Science of Dress in Theory and Practice* by Ada

Ballin who instead represents fashion as a royal despot and calls for a bloody end to its tyranny:

Men and women alike [...] bear, without a murmur, heavy weights, heat and cold, pinchings and squeezings which displace the vital organs and produce all sorts of deformities, and, in fact, a series of tortures which, if they, instead of being inflicted by such an impersonal tyrant as Fashion, had been enforced by any individual monarch, would have speedily brought his head to the scaffold, and have caused his name to be handed down to posterity as that of the cruelest of men and worst of kings. (4)

Ballin's comparison of fashion to a tyrannical king demonstrates English fears of political overthrow and revolution, best highlighted by similar fears of social overthrow and revolution, as well.²⁷ Even her language is reminiscent of the not-so-distant French Revolution in the eighteenth century; she claims that if fashion were an actual king, his people would have "speedily brought his head to the scaffold." But given fashion's origins in France, it is not English fashion that she wishes to overthrow, however, but French. Fashion, then, is figured as both foreign and invasive; it is a cruel foreign tyrant that tortures stalwart English citizens who bear the pain "without a murmur." Ballin calls not for the rejection of fashion altogether but rather, the fashion that pinches, squeezes, tortures, and deforms impersonally, because this tyrant does not have the well-being of the people in mind.

Gaskell's novel introduces Cranford's opinion of France, and Paris in particular, through the town's perception of the country as distinctly contagious; if France's

influence over England is contagious, then perhaps it can be avoided through careful quarantine. The social and legal regulation of contagion in the Victorian era marks a particular point of crisis in regards to the individual body's influence over the collective social body, and there were both serious and hysterical perceptions of contagion in the nineteenth century. In 1864, the first set of three Contagious Diseases Acts was issued in response to the growing number of men in the British armed services infected with venereal diseases. What the Acts ultimately regulate is not the sex trade rampant in the mid-nineteenth century, but instead the access men and women had to public arenas. As Judith Walkowitz reminds us, a woman only had to be identified as a "common prostitute" without any evidence of her actions to be arrested and to be forced to undergo a gynecological examination (2). The "common prostitute," because of her free access to public streets, becomes defined through freedom of movement; if the female body is neither regulated nor contained within class or social structures and allowed access to public streets and thoroughfares, it becomes associated with those streets' and thoroughfares' possibility of contagion. The nation of England, figured as the ultimate domestic home by writers such as Ellis, is thus on the world stage the private sphere; abroad, Englishmen and women cannot be protected from disease, filth, and contagion and in France, one would be susceptible to contagion. In *Cranford*, the contagious nature of France is demonstrated in the death of Thomas Holbrook, Miss Matty's juvenile sweetheart.

When Thomas Holbrook vacations in Paris and subsequently succumbs to an illness contracted there, the Amazons attribute his death not to his age or ill health, but

rather to the character of Paris itself. Miss Pole, Holbrook's cousin, tells Mary, "That journey to Paris was quite too much for him. [...] Paris has much to answer for, if it's killed my cousin Thomas" (38). While the journey itself takes part of the blame in Miss Pole's eyes, she then places Thomas's death squarely on the shoulders of the city. It is not only the journey to Paris, or even the city itself, however, that makes Holbrook fall ill, but is instead, very specifically, his *first* trip to Paris; the text seems to suggest that he has not built up an immunity to counter contagion. Holbrook claims, "I've never been there, and always had a wish to go; and I think if I don't go soon, I mayn't go at all" (36). Throughout the novel, various Cranford citizens discuss Holbrook in reverential terms, as a man who is solidly English, through and through. His cousin claims, "a better man never lived" (38), while Mary's narration reveals a man who "despised every refinement which had not its root deep down in humanity" (29). Despite his property ownership, Holbrook shuns all titles and "would not allow himself to be called Thomas Holbrook, *Esq.*; he even sent back letters with this address, telling the postmistress at Cranford that his name was *Mr. Thomas Holbrook, yeoman*" (28, emphasis original). In all of these descriptions, Holbrook is represented as a man who shuns refinements, and more specifically, refinements associated with the upper classes. Upon his first trip to Paris, then, one can assume that he encounters excesses with which he had never been presented before. Those excesses and refinements, the rich food, the French women, and the international travel, claim the life of Holbrook. Despite the fact that he has resisted change his entire life, he seeks it out in his twilight years, and "His housekeeper says he has hardly ever been round his fields since; but just sits with his hands on his knees in

the counting-house, not reading or anything, but only saying, what a wonderful city Paris was!’” (38). The town of Cranford believes that Paris’s charms have reduced Holbrook to an ill, static man, and his lack of work and motivation suggest he has become aristocratic in his sojourns abroad.²⁸ His disinterest in his fields can be read as a disinterest in England and its land, and his reiteration of the wonder of the French capital can be seen solely as infatuation with all he has missed. His death, therefore, is not his fault, but the fault of “that wicked Paris,” for tempting him away from home in both body and thought, and for forcing him to desire a place so decidedly not English.

These heightened anxieties over France’s influence on both the political and the social arenas of England are further revealed throughout the fictional and non-fictional discussions of fashion. Social and political upheavals greatly affect fashion, and in particular, the French Revolution has changed forever the way people dressed in both France and England.²⁹ In her 1895 work *The Gentlewoman’s Book of Dress*, written “Under the Patronage of H.M. the Queen and H.R.H. the Princess of Wales” for the series “The Victoria Library for Gentlewomen,” Mrs. Fanny Douglas argues first for the influence the French Revolution had over subsequent fashion, and claims, “It was in reality the French Revolution that first dimmed [color’s] beauty. Until [*La Guillotine*’s] advent it was a careless, thoughtless, heartless, yet beautiful world [...]. But *la Guillotine* tore aside the beautiful painted curtain, and showed the rags and bones behind, and the world has never been quite so merry since” (28-9). Douglas represents the deep class chasm in pre-Revolutionary France through the opulence and grandeur of aristocratic fashionable life. The concern for “wonderful coats and costly lace” for men

and “rich brocades and rustling fans” for women cause the aristocracy’s “charming empty heads” to be “all a-flutter with powder, ribbons, and feathers” (29). By painting fashion as the symbol of the social and economic divisions that sparked the Revolution, Douglas acknowledges the shifts in fashion’s meaning both before and after major historical events. Further, she argues for the role fashion plays in history, in nations, and in citizenry. The time pre-Revolution was, while “careless, thoughtless, heartless,” also a beautiful and colorful world; after the façade was removed, the world “has never been quite so merry since.” In Douglas’s framework, fashion symbolizes the excess and ostentation many associate with the French aristocracy. The French Revolution “first dimmed [color’s] beauty,” and thus a national action is figured through the aspects of dress. Functioning both as a literal and figurative historical marker, fashion, then, is both real and symbolic.

In *Cranford*, fashion can appear to be if not divorced from then at least ignorant of its historical context or its nation of origin, the same as it can be rewritten as both historical and foreign. Hilary M. Schor argues that “The point of dress in *Cranford* is not to reveal history; fashion is not historical because it has its own history—one of personal history or of individual connections [...] or of the individual meaning within the community but never of the ‘wicked’ revolutionary traces of, say, France” (100). Schor views *Cranford*’s rewriting of fashion’s history as a writing of “personal history” or “individual connections,” particularly in a town controlled, populated, and narrated by middle-class women. Thus female authorship in *Cranford* extends not only to personal history but to personal dress, as well. Yet *Cranford*’s anxieties over the national origin

of its fashionable attire to the point of rewriting fashionable origins suggest that while the “*point* of dress in Cranford is not to reveal history” (emphasis added), it still, in fact, does. The assimilation of French fashions into English culture would suggest that England was more influenced by French culture than its citizens would care to believe. Fashion historian Valerie Steele argues that “A particular new fashion cannot logically be said to ‘reflect’ developments within English society (such as the movement for women’s rights) or particularly English social attitudes, if, in fact, English women copied it from a French model” (*Fashion and Eroticism* 6-7). While the origination of most fashions in France does suggest that England’s sense of dress is more facsimile than originality, England not only copies but changes French fashions to suit English sensibilities. In her article “Reflections on Victorian Fashion Plates,” Sharon Marcus similarly reflects on fashion’s origins in France, and her argument supports Steele’s claims. Marcus remarks, “Despite historiographical claims about the role dress played in creating national identity, British fashion after the Napoleonic wars was transatlantic, and British fashion illustration *was* French. Most French fashion magazines published international coeditions, and the major British fashion magazines had Parisian offices and employed French artists to illustrate Parisian trends” (11, emphasis original). In this sense, then, English women and, most particularly, English designers and manufacturers, took French fashions and made them something altogether new. By changing styles and making them more modest, and therefore considered to be more English, Victorian women and their dressmakers created distinctly English fashions which therefore reflect

both “developments in English society” as well as “particularly English social attitudes.”³⁰

In “The Cage at Cranford,” an 1863 appendix to her 1853 novel, Elizabeth Gaskell returns both to Cranford town and to the idea of fashion among the Amazons by demonstrating the Cranfordian need to change a French fashion into an English one. This short story introduces the cage, or crinoline, to Cranford, and while she is once again the arbiter of good taste, even worldly Mary Smith cannot understand the significance and purpose of the cage. She writes to Mrs. Gordon, traveling abroad at the time, to bring back a present that is “pretty and new and fashionable” for Miss Pole, as the elderly lady “had just been talking a great deal about Mrs. FitzAdam’s caps being so unfashionable” (169). Mary later wishes she had asked for a present that “was not to be too fashionable; for there *is* such a thing” (169, emphasis original) because Mrs. Gordon sends her a cage from Paris, as “they were so much better made in Paris than anywhere else” (170). In these introductory paragraphs, the story fully acknowledges the superiority of France in the world of fashion; it suggests that one should go to Paris for the latest fashions, and one should expect higher quality from the fashions in France than those made anywhere else.

Mary Smith’s aside that there “*is* such a thing” as being “too fashionable,” however, anticipates the Amazons’ argument that the story later fulfills regarding the absurdity of some fashions, particularly those originating in France. Seemingly no one in Cranford even knows what a cage could be, and the townspeople argue that it is a birdcage (170), a mousetrap (176), or a meat-safe (177). When Fanny the maid suggests

that it could be a petticoat because “my sister-in-law has got an aunt as lives lady’s maid with Sir John’s daughter—Miss Arley. And they did say as she wore iron petticoats all made of hoops,” the townspeople express their disbelief that such a thing could exist (176), and that a maid would know of fashions before her employers. Even Mary argues against the claim that the “cage” is in fact an undergarment: “such a thing had not been heard of in all Drumble, let alone Cranford, and I was rather looked upon in the light of a fast young woman by all the laundresses of Cranford, because I had two corded petticoats” (176-77). The cage’s French origins automatically suggest three things to the people of Cranford: its indecency, its aristocratic associations, and its absurdity. Fanny’s recollection of the iron petticoats is due exclusively to her family’s position with an aristocratic family; the daughter of Sir John not only wears “indecent” undergarments, her servants who dress her and take care of her clothing know about them, too, and freely discuss them with others. Further, the suggestion that the cage is in fact an undergarment sparks disbelief in the Cranfordians because they cannot fathom that something as indecent as “a circle of hoops, neatly covered over with calico” (176) could come from anywhere, even France.

“The Cage at Cranford” pokes gentle fun at the crinoline’s absurdity, the story’s humor dependent on the crinoline’s construction and its novelty, as well as its uselessness of innovation and French origins. With the aid of the doctor, Mr. Hoggins, himself familiar with the crinoline because of his wife’s adoration of Parisian fashions, Mary and Miss Pole discover the cage’s actual purpose as a lady’s petticoat. The two women are chagrined not because of their lack of knowledge alone, but because a man

and a maid knew more about fashion than they.³¹ Keeping the crinoline seems not to be an option for Miss Pole, and she proposes instead that she and Mary “should cut up the pieces of steel or whalebone—which, to do them justice, were very elastic—and make ourselves two good comfortable English calashes out of them with the aid of a piece of dyed silk which Miss Pole had by her” (179). Miss Pole chooses function over form when she transforms the cage into calashes, and more importantly, she chooses England over France when she makes “good comfortable English calashes” out of a Parisian petticoat.³² Like Cook who “was evidently set against the new invention, and muttered about it being all of a piece with French things” (176), Miss Pole disavows the cage’s function as anything other than a piece of fashionable nonsense. The transformation of a piece of French fashion into an item of English necessity stretches the transformation of French fashions into English dress beyond the idea of modesty and into the realm of function: the calashes are needed in England’s rainy climate, and indeed, “What does it signify how we dress here at Cranford, where everybody knows us?” (2).

Yet the fact remains that the majority of fashions worn and purchased in nineteenth-century England originate in France either in manufacture or style, even those fashions enjoyed in Cranford where everyone knows each other.³³ When critics such as Valerie Steele and Sharon Marcus discredit the possibility for an English national discourse through fashion at this time, they suggest that national fashion only can occur if those fashions are original to the nation in question. Steele’s attention to the English copying of a new fashion from a French source (7) and Marcus’s attention to the English employment of French artists for British fashion magazines (11) focus solely on the

origin of fashion and not its dissemination. This interpretation divorces items of fashion such as dress, crinoline, or corset from the bodies that wear them. Most akin to Oliphant's concern over fashion as an impulse, Steele's and Marcus's arguments would discount the sheer fact that women accessorized, altered, or even transformed their clothing multiple times, for multiple trends, exhibiting multiple styles.³⁴ To view fashions as only French, then, is to discount an essential part of both fashion's and women's history.

I argue, therefore, that there is an "English fashion" in Cranford, and it is a conscious rejection of what is considered fashionable in Paris as well as in London. Because she understands London—her questioning "Have you any red silk umbrellas in London?" (2)—and understands Cranford—her constant use of "our" and "we" throughout the text—Mary Smith helps us recognize Gaskell's gently mocking tone of both fashionable imperatives like the crinoline and fashionable rejections like turning the crinoline into a hood to protect the head and face. This transformation of a crinoline into "English" calashes also argues for the understanding of "English fashion." Because fashion is clothing identified by change and popularity, the Cranford Amazons turn items fashionable outside of Cranford into unfashionable items in Cranford, as in their reconstruction of a seemingly unnecessary article of clothing like a crinoline into a seemingly necessary article of dress like a calash. Unlike Marcus, Schor, and Steele, I argue that in making an article of clothing more suited for their needs, the townspeople of Cranford create English fashion, here defined by its popularity, its usefulness, its

changing nature, and most importantly, its rejection of the common assumptions of fashionability.

The transformation of an item from a “French” fashion to an “English” necessity, as we see in Gaskell’s appendix to *Cranford*, even when played for humor, argues for fashion’s and dress’s engagement with nation on a multitude of levels. In the Victorian era, there seems to be an English impulse to transform a fashion in both style and national implication, as Miss Pole and Mary Smith transform the crinoline into good English calashes. While “The Cage at Cranford” gives us a humorous view of the crinoline’s migration from France to England, it signals Gaskell’s deeper understanding of national anxieties evident in mid-nineteenth-century England.³⁵ Her presentation of these anxieties, encapsulated in the seemingly trivial world of fashion, demonstrates that women, too, were engaged with nation, even women as disconnected as those from Cranford. The crinoline can stand in for some of the worst English fears of a French invasion, as the crinoline both exists close to a woman’s body and allows greater freedom of movement for that body itself.³⁶ The crinoline frees a woman’s body from excessive and numerous petticoats and, scandalous to many detractors of the crinoline, does not allow the skirt to touch any part of a woman’s legs. Perhaps because of these two particulars, its origins in France and its purpose in holding skirts away from the female body, the crinoline was charged with any manner of promiscuity, immorality, and even murder. In an anonymous moral tract from the 1850s, *Why Do the Ladies of the Nineteenth Century Dress As They Do?* the author argues that the circumference of the crinoline makes its wearer unaware of the amount of space required for movement, and

that women have been caught on fire and have endangered children on bridges. Citing an actual case of the latter, the author determines that had death ensued when the crinoline wearer knocked the child over the bridge, “the verdict of manslaughter must have been returned against either the crinoline or the wearer of it. We should almost have wished it to be against the former, for then there would have been some hope of the monster being transported, and thus expatriated” (11). The author holds fashion responsible for the hypothetical murder of the child—literally, in that she acknowledges the crinoline as a potential criminal—and sees the just punishment of those actions as the denial of home and nation. The crinoline “monster” should be “transported, and thus expatriated” from England, as much for the death of the innocent child as for wearing the crinoline that caused it.

For the citizens of Cranford, the very nature of Paris, often envisaged through the mercurial lens of fashion, is one of change, impulse, and revolution, and therefore is counter to everything Cranford believes in. The nature of Paris, then, is in fact no nature at all. This established opposition between Paris and Cranford becomes an opposition between French and English values at the same time it emulates the common opposition between city and country. When she informs Miss Matty and Mary of Mr. Holbrook’s demise, Miss Pole says, “To think of that pleasant day last June, when he seemed so well! And he might have lived this dozen years if he had not gone to that wicked Paris, where they are always having Revolutions” (39). Paris is characterized by constant change and the belief that “they are always having Revolutions”; in contrast, England, shown in encapsulation with the depiction of Cranford, is characterized by continuity

and sameness. Ian Baucom argues that influenced by Romantic and Victorian writers like William Wordsworth or John Ruskin, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century “English localists also suggested that England possessed an essential and continuous identity, and maintained that the nation’s task was to recover and preserve that identity” (16). Writers such as Ellis urge their readers to preserve England’s “essential and continuous identity,” and Gaskell’s tongue-in-cheek portrayal of the last provincial English town demonstrates both the humorous and serious repercussions of such beliefs: change. As Gaskell’s novel and others demonstrate, England’s “essential and continuous identity” is merely a façade; despite the nation’s best efforts, England suffers from the onslaught of change. While France is “always having Revolutions,” England’s Empire is having some of its own; Peter disappears from Cranford to fight in “some great war in India” (59). The French Revolution represents to England not just political change, but social change as well: France is marked perpetually by mutability. Schor argues that the representation of Frenchness in the novel—and therefore of all things foreign—demonstrates “the possibility of revolution, the threat of change and invasion” (100). This threat of change and invasion, as well as the possibility of revolution, are exactly the sorts of things the Amazons, and English citizens, fear. But further, Paris and its mutability are responsible for Mr. Holbrook’s death and are responsible for the tyrannous and continuous change of fashion.

Like so many other encapsulated issues, the fear of a French invasion of England appears in *Cranford* as a small-scale assault on the town itself in the form of a string of robberies perpetrated throughout the town; these robberies “could never have been

committed by any Cranford person; it must have been a stranger or strangers, who brought this disgrace” (90). Mary Smith notes that because Cranford, “so long piqued itself on being an honest and moral town,” the crimes cannot be enacted by a citizen, but rather by “strangers—if strangers, why not foreigners?—if foreigners, who so likely as the French?” (90). While the idea of French thieves is first sparked by Mrs. Forrester, the daughter and wife of military men who warred against France, the idea quickly spreads through the town because “French people had ways and means, which [Mrs. Forrester] was thankful to say the English knew nothing about” (90-1). The citizens of Cranford set themselves apart from those of France through their conjecture that “the Cranford people respected themselves too much [...] ever to disgrace their bringing up by being dishonest or immoral” (90), thereby aligning France with both dishonesty and immorality, those “ways and means [...] the English knew nothing about.” But the citizens of Cranford recognize the interlopers in their town as outsiders through their own misconceptions of national dress and their xenophobic notion that any foreigner is representative of all foreigners. Of course in Cranford town, all foreigners must come from France. Mary Smith points out Cranford’s belief that because “Signor Brunoni spoke broken English like a Frenchman” and wore the current French fashion, the turban, “there could be no doubt Signor Brunoni was a Frenchman—a French spy, come to discover the weak and undefended places of England” (90). This litany of details demonstrates the symbolic power dress holds in Cranford and how articles of clothing like the turban designate foreignness.³⁷ When Mrs. Forrester leaps from similarity to similarity regarding Signor Brunoni, his broken English, and his turban and concludes

that he must be “a Frenchman—a French spy,” she does so through stereotypical associations.³⁸

In fact, foreigner Signor Brunoni is in fact Englishman Samuel Brown, and this plot of the turban-wearing Englishman masquerading as an Italian traces not only English fear of home invasion, but the fear of social invasion as well. As the British Empire becomes global, so, too, do its people. By impersonating an Italian so ineffectively that instead he effectively impersonates the English stereotype of a French spy, Samuel Brown offers the possibility for the cosmopolitan Englishman, one fluent in other languages, and one familiar with foreign customs. Even further, his masquerade demonstrates how unc cosmopolitan the citizens of a small English town really are; he has hoodwinked them because they did not know any better. Samuel Brown’s social crimes are then threefold: he has abandoned his country, he has manipulated his countrymen, and he has caused a desire among the women of Cranford for those foreign manners and ideals of which Ellis warned. Further, his schemes have broken down his family, as six of his children have died over the course of his travels. His desire for difference, cosmopolitanism, and adventure devastates his sense of familial duty and his abandonment of his domestic responsibilities is writ large as an abandonment of both home and nation.

Fanny Douglas argues that “Good dressing, like charity, should begin at home” (43), and one of the ways Englishwomen could ensure that fashionable dress became recognizable as English would be to

encourage home industries. There have been movements in favour of this, but none general, none enthusiastic, none persistent enough. If they were more widespread and more faithfully carried out, a great deal of good might result, and some of the misery caused by too much population and too little work be done away with. (37)

Douglas recognizes the financial plight of her nation—misery, “too much population and too little work”—and offers a solution that lies within women’s province, and particularly with an issue so often dismissed as “ladies’ business.”³⁹ In fact, she reverses the work of Ellis and Gaskell whose home scenes represent the larger concerns of England; Douglas notes a large-scale domestic concern, that of Home, and offers a small-scale domestic solution within the home. Cranford’s Amazons also believe that “Good fashions begin at home”; their disdain of France and concern over the influence that nation, and in particular, “that wicked Paris,” holds over England, greatly influence their consumer choices. Cranford’s seemingly pastoral innocence is dependent on its belief in its own isolation, but it is confronted with its centrality, its internationality, again and again.

Two of the shops available to Cranford’s citizens, the Miss Barkers’ milliner’s shop and the universal shop, offer two nationalities of fashion. The Miss Barkers, former ladies’ maids, had saved to open their shop which “had been patronised by the ladies in the neighbourhood. Lady Arley, for instance, would occasionally give Miss Barkers the pattern of an old cap of hers, which they immediately copied and circulated among the *élite* in Cranford” (60). The Miss Barkers’ pretension to “not sell their caps

and ribbons to any one without a pedigree” depends solely on what they claim as their “aristocratic connection” (60). As Ellis reminds us, English aristocracy is a continental one, and therefore inundated with non-English manners, modes of speaking, and dress. A connection to the aristocracy, then, can be read as a connection to foreign nations, in particular, France. Yet Gaskell’s deliberate use of the French word “*elite*” shows that at least Mary understands that the denial of French influences in fashionable clothing, speech, and ideas is to the Cranfordians surface at best. For example, the universal shop no longer offers such French pretensions, and instead “the profits of brown soap and moist sugar enabled the proprietor to go straight to (Paris, he said, until he found his customers too patriotic and John Bullish to wear what the Mounseers wore) London” (60-1). The local proprietor of the universal shop sees the national identification of fashion and dress to be mostly rhetorical; Gaskell’s subtle irony here comes in the suggestion that the proprietor goes neither to Paris nor to London to get his wares. Yet when “Many a farmer’s wife or daughter turned away huffed from Miss Barkers’ select millinery” (60) and its exclusive clientele, they found refuge in the universal shop, which, as the proprietor “often told his customers, Queen Adelaide had appeared, only the very week before, in a cap exactly like the one he showed them, trimmed with yellow and blue ribbons, and had been complimented by King William on the becoming nature of her headdress” (61). The proprietor of Cranford’s universal shop understands that patriotism is now “in”; he avoids mention of Paris and instead promotes his wares as the height of English fashion. A false compliment from Queen Adelaide sells the yellow and blue ribboned cap more than the “truth” that the Miss Barkers “confined themselves

to” (61). What the Miss Barkers know, and what Cranford tries to forget, is that many fashions are, in origin, French. This kind of truth, it seems, is not fashionable. Rather, Englishness is en vogue, and indeed, one should not argue with the fashionable benefits of a cap supported by the King’s own compliments.

Despite their best efforts and those of their shopkeepers and milliners, the people of Cranford are faced with change, and more often than not, fashion is the hallmark of change in *Cranford*. While the Amazons stalwartly resist changing fashion trends by clinging to their gray flannels and red umbrellas, they still are ushered into the present by the presence of France and of Mary Smith. Mary Smith is often the arbiter of good taste in Cranford, and Mary’s know-how protects Cranford’s citizens—in particular, Miss Matty—from the greatest fashion sin of all: bad taste. The turban that becomes an article of great debate in the Cranford community is symbolic not only for its suggestion that the French have invaded England, but also for the fashion trend it sparks in the heart of Cranford’s women. Miss Matty, in particular, is enamored of Signor Brunoni’s turban, and sends a letter to Mary asking “if turbans were in fashion” and reminding her young friend that “sea-green was her favourite colour” (81). When Mary refuses to “disfigur[e] her small gentle mousey face with a great Saracen’s-head turban” and instead brings her “a pretty, neat, middle-aged cap,” Miss Matty finds it “a disappointment” (81). Miss Matty’s desires for such a fashionable hat stem not only from her recent encounters with Signor Brunoni and his magic show, but also with the Miss Barkers’ millinery, owned by the two Cranford women with aristocratic connections and elite clientele. The elder woman attempts to become more fashionable

by following trends without regard to whether those trends would suit her face, figure, or age. She attempts to justify her desires to Mary by claiming, “I should have liked something newer, I confess—something more like the turbans Miss Betty Barker tells me Queen Adelaide wears [...] I suppose turbans have not got down to Drumble yet?” (81-2). The Miss Barkers, it seems, have taken a page from the universal shop and are hawking their wares as the height of English fashion; Miss Matty claims to desire the turban because Queen Adelaide wears one, not because of Signor Brunoni’s influence. She immediately disassociates herself with non-English peoples at the same time she embraces English fashions; like the shawl with its distant origins in India, the turban, too, has found its place in English society, despite its own exotic origin. Further, Miss Matty attempts to claim a more innate fashion sense than her young, cosmopolitan friend, and casts Drumble as a backwater town. When she arrives at the party later that evening, she tells the other Amazons, “I was foolish to expect anything very genteel out of the Drumble shops—poor girl! she did her best, I’ve not doubt” to which Mary slyly tells the reader, “But for all that, I had rather that she blamed Drumble and me than disfigured herself with a turban” (82). The contact with Signor Brunoni, rather than the suggestion of Miss Barker, immediately influences Miss Matty’s tastes; yet the novel anticipates the eventual unmasking of Italian Signor Brunoni as Englishman Samuel Brown. The foreign fashions that Miss Matty craves are, then, despite their foreign origin, still English in consumption. Therefore Miss Matty’s desires for such a hat are not seen as unpatriotic to her country; her desire for the turban is just bad taste.

Mary Smith's careful navigation of Miss Matty away from both fashion faux pas and economic decline—she keeps Miss Matty away from the turban and is instrumental in bringing a wealthy Peter home to Cranford—is representative of the protection Cranford offers to the members of its community, which is in itself representative of the protection England offers to the members of its nation. Mary Smith functions as a viable, useful, and trusted community member who protects her fellow citizens from foreign threats and, eventually, financial ruin. As Benedict Anderson reminds us, a nation “is an imagined political community” (6), “imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (7). This “deep, horizontal comradeship” is highlighted in *Cranford* again and again, but most specifically, through the arena of fashion; one example of such is, of course, how Mary Smith's style and know-how help usher in new trends and protect Cranford from the old.

But more importantly, Cranford's Amazons form a community with their red umbrellas, their turbans, and their good material; their domestic agendas—the home scenes that are microcosmic examples of larger domestic concerns—fulfill Ellis's call for the women of England to protect its symbolic borders. Ellis justifies her conduct tract and its purpose by arguing that her work intends “to show how intimate is the connexion which exists between the **women** of England, and the **moral** character maintained by their country in the scale of nations” (38, emphasis original), and that Englishwomen “preside” over the domestic sphere (39). What Ellis argues, and what Cranford's Amazons prove, is that these “minor morals of domestic life” are as

important as imperial conquests and expansions to the creation and maintenance of England's cultural character. The crisis of national authenticity is represented in *Cranford* by small-scale French invasions and in England by very real concerns over the introduction of foreign characteristics into the very character of England. As the definition of "Englishness" changes with the face of the nation, so, too, do the expectations for "women's duty" and the figuring of authentic Englishwomen as protectors as well as symbols of cultural legitimacy. Nineteenth-century England's concern over authenticity in its women often perpetuates itself in the arena of fashion, as Chapter III will demonstrate. The figures of Amelia Sedley and Becky Sharp in William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* function as microcosmic examples of how the struggle between naturalness and artificiality in fashion often is symbolic of the struggle between domestic and foreign, and thus the struggle for social and cultural dominance in England, among English peoples.

Notes

¹ In her book *Domesticity, Imperialism, and Emigration in the Victorian Novel*, Diana C. Archibald argues for the dual definition of "home": "Home is not a physical space alone but a combination of house and feeling (i.e., home is constructed not merely of brick and mortar but, more important, of 'Peace' and 'love'). Home is 'a sacred place,' made so by the efforts of its inhabitants, particularly the women [...]. Indeed, not only does woman create the domestic space, but that space also helps create her" (6).

² The 1830s and 1840s are a time of social and political change in England, particularly with the crowning of Queen Victoria in 1837. In my later chapter on women's love of fashion, Chapter IV, I discuss further how the early- to mid-nineteenth century experiences an onslaught of change.

³ *The Women of England* is succeeded by tracts addressed to Daughters, Mothers, and Wives.

⁴ Because many nations possess what they deem “national dress,” they therefore are accustomed to reading dress as nationally charged. I define national dress here as clothing that is racially, culturally, or socially constructed to represent and distinguish visually one national citizen from another. In my final chapter on the suffrage movement, I will return to this idea of national dress.

⁵ Ellis’s text is quite literally a “manners text” in that she expresses her desire to influence the women of the rising middle class. She states that “Perhaps it may be necessary to be more specific in describing the class of women to which this work relates. It is, then, strictly speaking, to those who belong to that great mass of the population of England which is connected with trade and manufactures, as well as to the wives and daughters of professional men of limited incomes; or, in order to make the application more direct, to that portion of it who are restricted to the services of from one to four domestics” (19). She wishes to teach these women how to behave in a manner befitting what she believes is a superior class than the class from which they came. Manners texts like Ellis’s were used to facilitate a transition between classes, particularly in the fluidity of the nineteenth-century middle class.

⁶ Some recent scholarly criticism on *Cranford* has focused on domesticity and manners, sexuality and maternity, and crafts and needlework. For further discussion, see works by Natalie Kapetanior Meir, Talia Schaffer, Lisa Niles, and Maria Fitzwilliam.

⁷ In calling the women of Cranford “Amazons,” Gaskell offers her female characters participation in the aggressive maintenance and defense of their homes. This characterization is a rather sly one on the part of the narration, however, in that these Amazons aggressively maintain and defend their homes through manners, parties, and other so-called trivial “feminine concerns.” The designation “Amazon,” then, is twofold: it offers a serious glimpse into the importance of “feminine concerns” in the construction of town, and thus nation and Empire, and it offers comic relief in the vision of the elderly women of Cranford as warrior women.

⁸ In “Mothers of Empire in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Cranford*,” Julie Fenwick argues that “The majority of middle-class male characters who do appear in *Cranford* are involved in such military imperialism” as is concerned with activities “that serve to keep the domestic mills of Drumble supplied with raw materials and foreign markets” (410). Fenwick draws a direct connection between military/imperialism and the availability of textiles, and therefore a direct connection between military/imperialism and the creation of fashion.

⁹ Mary insists that “If we wore prints, instead of summer silks, it was because we preferred a washing material; and so on, till we blinded ourselves to the vulgar fact, that we were, all of us, people of very moderate means” (4). Here, too, Mary’s suggestion that the Amazons actively choose to be unfashionable argues for Cranford’s contrariness.

¹⁰ In choosing to use “good and plain” material for their dresses, the women of Cranford fulfill Fanny Douglas’s expectations for a gentlewoman. In *The Gentlewoman’s Book of Dress* (1895), Douglas notes, “The true gentlewoman will exercise a wise abstemiousness in regard to fashion. Its monstrosities in the way of sleeves and headgear she will avoid; its unsuitabilities in the way of trained street-dresses she will withstand; its exactions in regard to colour and material she will defy” (6).

¹¹ Oliphant notes, “The change is chiefly visible in feminine apparel, yet even in the case of men, the morning clothes, in which so many look their best, and are most entirely at their ease, may be said to be the creation of the last quarter of a century. The black frock coat, which is now the solemn uniform of town, the semi-state dress of morning assemblies, afternoon teas, the Park, and society, was then the common garment of all-work, without which no man could go abroad; and this of itself is a revolution” (2). The frock coat that Oliphant refers to is an inheritance of French society, and, in particular, the Revolutionary working class. In *Sex and Suits*, Anne Hollander tell us that the essential piece of the *sans-culotte* revolution, trousers, “chiefly derived from the French Revolutionary working-man’s *sans-culotte* costume, although they were also worn by British common sailors and colonial slave-laborers” and had “exciting plebeian connotations” (54).

¹² Englishness is often proclaimed in direct contrast with Frenchness. Linda Colley reminds us in both *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* and “Britishness and Otherness: An Argument” that national identity, particularly British and English national identity, often is construed in “the ways in which Britons define themselves against a real or imaginary Other, against the outside” (“Britishness and Otherness” 311). We will return to this and similar conversations further in the chapter.

¹³ Suzanne Daly notes that “They are also a coveted gift that men returning from colonial service in India bestow upon their mothers and sisters” (238), and that in “most English novels, we only see shawls once they enter the realm of the domestic, where they are offered up to women as gifts” (248).

¹⁴ Nupur Chaudhuri’s chapter, “Shawls, Jewelry, Curry, and Rice in Victorian Britain” notes that “Genuine Kashmir shawls were expensive, costing between seventy and one hundred pounds each in the 1810s. Since the cost of an Indian shawl was so high, its market was limited to wealthy women” (233).

¹⁵ Daly and other critics differentiate between the Kashmir shawl, which refers to shawls made specifically in Kashmir, and the more generic Indian shawl, which refers to shawls made in varying parts of India. For the purposes of this article, the Kashmir and Indian shawls will be treated interchangeably, as it is their symbolism that is important for this work; once in England, both types of shawls mean the same thing, despite their manufacturing.

¹⁶ Buie notes that after the Kashmir shawl fell out of favor, “scores of Kashmiri weavers died of starvation, while most European textile manufacturers merely shifted their production to more profitable goods” (50).

¹⁷ Buie argues that the imitation Kashmir shawls, those made in England and France, tried “to approximate the qualities of goat fleece with various combinations of wool and silk. Though the European shawls do not by any means equal those from Kashmir, many of the early ‘imitation’ shawls have a distinctive beauty of another sort” (48).

¹⁸ In her article “Consuming Kashmir: Shawls and Empires, 1500-2000,” Michelle Maskiell explains that the Paisley design is not an English invention, but rather, an Indian one. The popular paisley, with its bent teardrop shape, is “a characteristic woven design [...] the *buta* (or *boteh*, literally ‘flower’)” (29). The appropriation of this design by English manufacturers is another example of the domestication of the Indian shawl, and its refashioning in the “English” style.

¹⁹ Buie notes, “Taking the lead in 1812 with an important technical advance that coordinated the weft of five different shuttles, Paisley managed to produce a large number of shawls at great speed. In addition, its enterprising manufacturers were not above pirating successful Norwich designs and producing them more cheaply, or lowering standards to cut costs” (49). This ability to mass produce the shawls contrasts with the expected production rate of the original Kashmir shawl, one of which was eighteen months in the making (Buie 44).

²⁰ Chaudhuri notes, “Its aesthetic value aside, the Kashmir shawl was also considered to be an item of tangible wealth. The shawl from India was listed in *trousseaux*, and the item was regarded as a valued inheritance” (234).

²¹ Fenwick suggests that *Cranford* is, in fact, all about “the impact of nineteenth-century British imperialism upon English society, particularly on English women” (409).

²² From Eliza Lynn Linton “The Girl of the Period” (360).

²³ In “Gendering Nationhood: A Feminist Engagement with National Identity,” Joanne Sharp also calls for a definition of nationalism that encompasses this “us” versus “them” ideology, and notes, “national identity is also constructed through engagements with the international realm [...]. The daily plebiscite of national identification constructs not only the national ‘us’ but also ‘them,’ those who are outside and different” (105-6).

²⁴ Christina Boufis suggests that the varied and multiple responses to Linton “demonstrate that regulating the modern girl and controlling her presentation and representation is part of a larger struggle in England for national self-definition” (99), and reminds us that many writers of the time saw women’s dress in direct connection with their morality (100).

²⁵ Linton believes that England’s deterioration is a direct result of a decline in the quality of its women, but while Linton accounts for her countrywomen’s agency and complicity in their nation’s decline, she does not allow for the idea that women also advance their nation. While Ellis argues that the women of England actively protect their nation’s interest in keeping its “moral wealth,” Linton believes that the protection of a nation is solely the province of its men. Linton’s misogyny, militant opposition, and dislike of her countrywomen paint a bleak picture for the future of the nation as Englishwomen are the symbols, rather than the agents, of the nation’s ideologies; to protect the nation, therefore, its women must be reigned in.

²⁶ In *Aspects of British Political History, 1815-1914*, Stephen J. Lee argues that in the period from 1815-1870, “At least part of the establishment felt that unchecked poverty and squalor might increase political unrest and even threaten revolution,” particularly after moments of “‘panics’, or reactions to specific crises like the cholera epidemics of 1832, 1837, and 1847, and the typhus outbreaks in 1837 and 1839” (283-84). One of his earlier chapters, “Britain and the Threat of Revolution 1789-1832,” discusses the impact of the French Revolution on Britain’s chances of the same. While Lee acknowledges the “manifestations of unrest” in the various riots in the late eighteenth century, he and “most historians now accept that there was relatively little threat of general insurrection, at least on the British mainland” (17).

²⁷ In “The Meaning of Revolution in Britain: 1770-1800,” George Woodcock argues for the influence of the French Revolution not only on matters of politics and economy, but also on in the eventual political reform in England during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (1). He notes, “In a more direct way the French Revolution influenced British political attitudes by creating a more articulate and more sharply focused kind of radicalism than that which had existed before and by changing in British minds the meaning of the word ‘revolution’” (1). This shift in definition moved “revolution” beyond political overthrow to social and gender concerns, and to fashion, as Ballin uses it, as well.

²⁸ As we see with Isabel Vane in Ellen Wood's novel *East Lynne*, the aristocracy is characterized in literature by refusal or inability to work. Mr. Holbrook's ennui immediately following his trip to France suggests that the circuitous connection between France and the aristocracy has led to a character degeneration.

²⁹ Fred Davis reminds us of the sumptuary laws of the fourteenth century "which forbade commoners from displaying fabrics and styles that aristocracy sought to reserve for itself" (58). This regulation of dress sought to separate the middle and upper classes from the working and lower classes, but at the dawn of the French Revolution, the inverse became popularized. In a move that Coco Chanel capitalizes on in the twentieth century with her "little black dress," middle- and upper-class men began to dress like their lower-class counterparts, partially in denial of aristocratic ostentation. In her study *The Male Image: Men's Fashion in Britain 1300-1970*, Penelope Byrde argues, "The vogue for more practical country and sporting wear accelerated after the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, and all that appeared aristocratic or ostentatious was unpopular. English fashion adapted itself to the new social changes by taking up aspects of lower-class dress, and in a wave of Anglomania the French copied these clothes with fervour. The English riding coat was transferred to the height of fashion in Paris" (80). The main fashion innovation of this trend was the discarding of breeches in favor of long trousers, heretofore only associated with working-class men (Byrde 85). By taking Byrde's argument into account, we can assume that the transmission of fashion trends was both from France to England and from England to France.

³⁰ In her study *The Art of Dress*, Mrs. H. R. Haweis discusses the transmission of fashion from Parisian designers to English milliners, and how designs change to cater to English sensibilities. For Haweis, this carries disastrous results: "The ordinary milliner gets a pattern dress or bonnet from some firm in Paris which has copied some Parisian *élégante*, who may possibly possess an eye for colour. The *élégante* invents a combination; the trade-houses catch it up more or less exactly; they transmit it to England, and generally the second and third editions show signs of having suffered a decided change" (114-15).

³¹ While Victorian fashion tracts are rife with concern over servants' superior knowledge in the arena of fashion, this story's addition of a man to that mix seems unique. However, Mr. Hoggins' position as town doctor gives him access to the particulars of the female form, which Miss Pole does not believe gives him "a right to be indecent" (178). Gaskell avoids a direct suggestion of indecency by giving the authority to Mr. Hoggins' wife, who enjoys fashion books so much that Mr. Hoggins "can't help seeing the plates of fashions sometimes" (178).

³² *A Dictionary of Costume and Fashion, Historic and Modern* tells us that a calash is a "Hood made on hoops" (42) "to be pulled over head or folded back.

Fashionable in 18th century, after introduction by Duchess of Bedford. Copied from folding hood or top of calash or light carriage” (176).

³³ In Chroniqueuse’s *Photographs of Paris Life*, we learn that in May of 1859, “The rage for gored skirts still continues, and many of the leaders of fashion are making their appearance (whenever the weather will allow them) *sans* crinoline. I need not say that these ladies were the first to adopt the above much-abused article of ladies’ apparel, and are now the first to leave it off—and leave it off in the fullest sense of the expression—without even the *jupons* which were used before the advent of crinoline” (16). Here, French women are credited both with discovering and perpetuating a new fashion and with abandoning a fashion once it is passé. This fashionably innovative thinking accredited to French women is an idea circulated throughout the nineteenth century.

³⁴ While these transformations may seem confined to working-class or economically poorer women who could not afford to purchase the latest fashions new, it is counterintuitive to assume that only poor women altered their fashions. In fact, many fashion trends are sparked by personal alterations, desires, or requests. Margaret MacDonald, Susan Grace Galassi, and Aileen Ribeiro tell us that “Worth introduced looped-up crinolines with ankle-length skirts, revealing colored stockings and walking boots” in 1863, at request of Empress Eugenie (26).

³⁵ Valerie Steele tells us that “Empress Eugenie was widely credited with the invention of the crinoline, while responsibility for every new and immodest style was attributed to Parisian courtesans” (*Fashion and Eroticism* 18), a fact made evident by Linton’s diatribe against the French demi-monde. Thus the crinoline not only originates in France in manufacture, but also in design, purpose, and popularity.

³⁶ In *Victorian Panorama: A Survey of Life and Fashion from Contemporary Photographs* (1937), a retrospective on the Victorian era, Peter Quennell views the crinoline as an essential tool in creating ethereal beauty: “Henceforward, woman was not a two-legged viviparous animal, but an exquisite and unreal being who moved, without any apparent means of locomotion, in a perpetual sighing rustle of silken drapery” (92).

³⁷ The full passage suggests that although the turban is Turkish in origin, “Mrs. Forrester had seen a print of Madame de Staël with a turban on, and another of Mr. Denon in just such a dress as that in which the conjuror had made his appearance; showing clearly that the French, as well as the Turks, wore turbans” (90). This faulty logic is representative of Cranford’s conflation of all things foreign into Frenchness.

³⁸ Signor Brunoni’s foreignness is too distinct to be anything but an act—we later find out he is in fact Englishman Samuel Brown—and Mrs. Forrester misreads the act as authentic because both she and Signor Brunoni are English. Signore Brunoni’s

performance of a foreigner and his self-creation as one is heavily influenced by English ideas of foreign peoples; he, like Mrs. Forrester, associates the turban and broken English with generic foreignness which, in Cranford town, automatically designates French. Further, the plot of the turban-wearing Englishmen masquerading as Italians traces not only English fear of home invasion, but the fear of social invasion as well. Samuel Brown offers the possibility of the cosmopolitan Englishman, one fluent in other languages, and one familiar with foreign customs. Even further, his poor masquerade demonstrates how unc cosmopolitan the citizens of a small English town really are; he has hoodwinked the citizens of Cranford town precisely because their knowledge of foreign lands is heavily influenced by conjecture, stereotype, and misconception.

³⁹ Douglas also suggests specific manufacturers as distinctly English, particularly Liberty Fashions. She reminds her readers, “Messrs. Liberty have shown more public spirit than any in encouraging home manufactories. Some of their most beautiful fabrics are made on English looms, and their periodic exhibitions of English-made goods are interesting and useful in showing what good work the British mills can do” (39).

CHAPTER III

FASHION OUT OF PLACE: ENGLISHNESS ABROAD, FOREIGNNESS AT HOME, AND THE NATURAL-ARTIFICIAL DIVIDE

In her 1878 treatise on fashion, aestheticism, and appearance, *The Art of Beauty*, Mrs. H. R. Haweis (Eliza Haweis) examines the history of dress and popular fashion trends throughout the centuries and instructs her readers on how to choose the most becoming dress and ornamentation. While she strives to instruct all women on proper color coordination and on draping fabrics according to natural bodylines, and while she attempts to maintain a modicum of global awareness for a burgeoning literary market, she cannot avoid calling attention to Englishwomen's superiority in the world of beauty. Haweis argues,

The Englishwomen are considered by all nations to be among the most beautiful in the world, whilst the French are commonly far less gifted by nature, but a Frenchwoman understands how to hide her defects and enhance her beauties to a far greater extent than an Englishwoman—and this, not because her moral character is necessarily lower, but simply because she belongs to an artistic race, cultivating aesthetic tastes. (258-9)

Haweis presents her belief in the superiority of Englishwomen and their natural beauty, and she argues that Frenchwomen, by contrast, “are commonly far less gifted by nature.” Instead, Frenchwomen excel in artificial beauty, and understand “how to hide [their] defects and enhance [their] beauties.” Haweis excuses this artificiality of Frenchwomen

as a product of racial heritage rather than inferior morality—the Frenchwomen “belong to an artistic race”—but she cannot resist the insinuation that morality is at least partly to blame. Haweis argues that a Frenchwoman is capable of the artificial construction of beauty “to a far greater extent than an Englishwoman,” thus suggesting the Frenchwoman is capable of great excess. In Haweis’s estimation, this is “not because her moral character is necessarily lower” than an Englishwoman’s; the adverb “necessarily,” however, suggests that Haweis believes that a lowered moral character may at least be partly responsible for a Frenchwoman’s comprehension of the artifices of beauty and dress.¹

Yet Haweis never tells her readers exactly how they are to distinguish visually Frenchwomen and Englishwomen; the only advice she offers is that Englishwomen are “among the most beautiful in the world,” declared so by “all nations,” while Frenchwomen “are commonly far less gifted by nature.” Haweis believes not only in natural beauty, but also, in contrast, artificially constructed beauty, which she equates with English and French women, respectively. This equation of English and Frenchwomen in her text follows a discussion of the supposed lack of vanity on the part of Englishwomen, in which Haweis states that in fear of appearing vain, some women in England “act stupidly in mere self-defence. If they are handsome, they surround themselves with as many disadvantages as their plainer sisters” (258). In this sense, then, Englishwomen are capable of the same sort of artifice as Frenchwomen, even if that artifice is seen as detracting from rather than enhancing beauty. Their artifice is a response to what Haweis suggests might be “only a certain innocent wish to look one’s

best” which can be just “another name for self-respect” (258). By establishing a division between women’s artificiality and naturalness, between standards for constructed beauty and natural beauty, and by establishing that division on nationalist lines, Haweis reiterates Victorian England’s common division between French and English, and establishes that division on gendered lines. But so, too, is a Frenchwoman’s origin in an “artistic race” responsible for her understanding of beauty, and Haweis believes an artistic race has responsibilities. In the conclusion to Haweis’s statement, she tells her reader that in an artistic race, “whereby sculpture, and painting, and music, and beauty within and without are regarded, not as distinct *trades*, as in England, but as parts of a duty owed to our fellow-creatures, and to the best that is in us” (258-59, emphasis original). By using the inclusive “our” and “us,” Haweis equates the “artistic race” not necessarily with France or with England, but rather with an ideal nation that understands beauty as a duty that is also dependent on “the best that is in us”; beauty is in Haweis’s argument both selfless and natural, and therefore not artificial.

The idea of “natural” versus “artificial” beauty lies at the very heart of fashion, particularly in the nineteenth century. As clothing enters a new era, one of mass-production and affordability, so, too, do its wearers. The mass production of clothing, its proliferation among all levels of social class, and its distribution across countries and across empire all feed directly into a crisis of recognition for the English people, and, in particular, the middle class. The changing social landscape made it difficult for those concerned with the purity of the English race and the insulation of the middle class to tell an Englishwoman from a Frenchwoman, or a middle-class lady from her maid. If

the democratization of clothing makes finer dress available for everyone, then anyone can purchase finer dress. So, too, does the expanding Empire, and with it, easier travel, cause the very definition of Englishness to be in peril. As new foreign peoples enter England as citizens of the British Empire, their presence challenges distinctions between the born Englishman or woman and immigrants or travelers. When writers like Haweis conflate “race” and “nation,” they offer a representative view of the Victorian understanding of how designations like “French” signal racial difference (birthright) as well as national difference (consequences of birth).

In Chapter II, I argued that the reverence for Englishness in fashion tracts and novels expresses concerns over national definition and authenticity, and that representations of Englishness and of good Englishwomen such as those in *Cranford* town reassure a nation that it is not losing its sense of self in an ever-expanding empire full of ever-multiplying cosmopolitans. This chapter expands on these notions of the recognition of those good and true Englishwomen, and is concerned with the presentation of ideal Englishness, and, in particular, how foreign women and foreign landscapes complicate a nation’s ability to recognize itself through the figure of its women, in William Thackeray’s 1848 novel *Vanity Fair*. As women so often have been used as symbols of nationhood—Lady Liberty’s representation of America or France, for example, or Britannia herself, figured as a strong-armed woman clothed in the colors of England—the nation makes their very existence symbolic of larger cultural and national distinctions. Because of the complex symbolic structures that place women in iconic positions, it becomes vital, therefore, for England to protect its women and to

insulate them from encroaching foreign peoples and ideals. Fashion becomes important in the determination of nation and nationality, particularly in foreign venues in which all of Englishness is at stake. As clothing, heretofore commissioned, expensive, tailored, and unique, is copied, distributed, sold second-hand or passed down, it loses its individuality and its uniqueness. This mass production and reproduction of clothing removes its luxurious status and allows any consumer with the appropriate purchasing power to own items previously outside the realm of possibility. This fashion is then “out of place,” socially, economically, and, as the Empire presses inward, nationally, and its communicable message of wealth, individuality, and national origin becomes open to question and interpretation.

As we move from crises of authenticity to crises of recognition, from Cranford town to war-torn Brussels, we move from isolationism to cosmopolitanism, from home to abroad, from domestic to foreign. Eliza Lynn Linton’s argument for Englishwomen’s superiority over Italian, German, American, and, in particular, French women is dependent on Englishwomen’s generosity, capability, and modesty, frankness, bravery, and grace (“Girl of the Period” 356). For Linton, Englishwomen are “something franker than a Frenchwoman” (Linton 356), and Haweis reiterates Linton’s claim when she argues that Frenchwomen’s artificial constructions of self, through fashion, are more successful deceptions than Englishwomen are capable of.² These deceptions would counter an ideal of English womanhood that is defined in part by modesty and frankness. In short, both Linton and Haweis believe that Frenchwomen and, by extension, other non-English women, are better liars than Linton’s and Haweis’s native countrywomen.

The construction of beauty through the medium of fashion is, of course, not limited to non-English women, but the Victorian literature examining English dress insists otherwise. Haweis's and Linton's concerns regarding the influence of foreign thought on Englishwomen's dress is suggested, mirrored, and satirized in the fictional literature of Victorian England. What these concerns best represent are the national concerns over what defines a "true" Englishwoman. By labeling certain clothing and fashion styles English or non-English, writers attempt to separate English and non-English women through their outward appearances rather than their innate selves; national difference, therefore, is designated not by blood or race, but by a recognizable construction of the self. As Britannia's Empire expands across the globe, she acquires more people of various national origins. Because this empire encompasses several nations, peoples, and races, England begins to look for authentic examples of "true" Englishness as the very definitions of Englishness and Britishness are changing. This crisis of authenticity is concerned not with Englishwomen alone, but also with the continuing change of the definition of "English" or "British." Fashion and style, then, are requisitioned to be possible signifiers of racial and national difference, as, according to writers like Haweis, the more attention a woman is seen to pay to her personal clothing and dress, the more her foreignness is revealed.

To suggest that Englishwomen are naturally unaware of stylistic construction, therefore, is to suggest that the consciousness of stylishness and fashionability is inherently foreign. George Meredith's 1897 novel *Diana of the Crossways* presents Diana Warwick, a woman falsely accused of adultery, whose Irishness marks her

difference. Yet her distinct national difference is not limited to her Irishness; rather that Irishness becomes symbolic to England of the worst of foreign peoples. Early in the novel, Lady Wathin is questioned about her opinions of Diana's beauty, and notes, "she has good looks to aid her. Judging from what I hear and have seen, her thirst is for notoriety. Sooner or later we shall have her making a noise, you may be certain. Yes, she has the secret of dressing well—in the French style" (140-1). Lady Wathin, representative of English aristocracy, automatically connects notoriety with French fashions; she sees Diana as a flamboyant social climber with too many connections to Paris. Further, Diana's Irishness, while not directly referenced here, is instead overwritten by Frenchness, as almost all non-Englishness in England is conflated with Frenchness. In particular, Diana's Irishness implies Catholicism, which solidifies the comparison of French and Irish. But what is most interesting about Lady Wathin's speech is the suggestion that women of notoriety have furtive connections to fashion. Diana is not described as a fashionable woman because she is beautiful and wears beautiful clothes; instead, she has the "secret of dressing well." This suggests that to dress well, one must acquire mystical knowledge that is not available to all women, and, most particularly, not available to Englishwomen. The "secret of dressing well" is connected not with furtive feminine knowledge but rather with furtive foreign knowledge; if a woman has such a secret, then she must be secretive.

When Diana dresses well "in the French style," she assumes all of the baggage that that statement entails; as Haweis reminds her audience, "Frenchwomen, on the contrary, have carried too far the idea of dress as an index of the inner self" (*Art of*

Beauty 18). The French style as Lady Wathin and George Meredith define it is marked by this “idea of dress as an index of the inner self.” In short, the French style is marked not by art but by artifice. While to dress well because of an eye for colors, lines, and fabrics would be to have a talent for fashion, to dress well in the French style is to understand that fashion is, at its heart, artificial. To understand dress as “an index of the inner self” is to understand that the inner self can be constructed, to suit whatever self a woman wishes to create. By carrying that idea “too far,” Frenchwomen are guilty not only of constructing a beautiful body enhancing beauty and hiding defects (Haweis 258), but also of excess.

Vanity Fair offers a dichotomous presentation of foreign and English women that is rooted in the fashionable through its comparison of Becky Sharp and Amelia Sedley. Frenchwomen’s dress signals deception and deceit to the English because they associate it with artificiality, and believe that Frenchwomen, with the same recognition, attempt trickery by enhancing beauty and hiding defects; therefore Englishwomen’s supposed ignorance of dress would signal innocence and purity. The characters’ opinions of foreign women in novels like Meredith’s and Thackeray’s reiterate England’s beliefs in national difference and the moral superiority of Englishwomen; characters like Diana Warwick and Becky Sharp stand in stark contrast to their English counterparts because of their innate fashion sense, but more importantly, because of the suggestion of artificiality to which such style alludes. Thackeray’s novel, however, understands that establishing a standard of morality based on a woman’s use of fashion to manipulate beauty is arbitrary. In this chapter, I argue that Thackeray’s presentation of Becky Sharp

as “artificial” and Amelia Sedley as “natural” is in fact a judgment on these arbitrary distinctions made between Frenchwomen’s and Englishwomen’s constructions of dress. His presentation of Amelia’s learned “naturalness” exposes that there is no natural style; that is, style is a cultural construct that is learned by both Becky and Amelia, and both French and English women, and thus can never be “natural.” In Thackeray’s estimation, Becky’s “artifice” and Amelia’s “naturalness” are the same; these distinctions just become another social division distinguishing women by national affiliations through the arena of fashion.

Vanity Fair also offers a further glimpse into the cutthroat world of nineteenth-century women’s fashion. Thackeray’s novel, through continuously showing fashion to be “out of place,” believes that there is no “right” place for women and their fashions, even in their own nation, among their own people, because English standards of womanhood will not allow England’s women a place of feminine power. The novel takes place largely in two arenas: in Brussels during the Napoleonic Wars, and in London during the prelude to and aftermath of those Wars. In these two arenas, both Amelia and Becky are presented as “out of place”; specifically, Amelia is an Englishwoman abroad in Brussels, and Becky is a Frenchwoman at “home” in London. Through moments that call attention to their social discomfort, disjointedness, or fashionable faux pas, as well as those moments that celebrate their style, fashionability, and “natural” beauty, Becky and Amelia suffer or cause others to suffer under the power fashion wields in society. What *Vanity Fair* demonstrates, then, is that fashion is affected not only by trends, personal desires, and the national beliefs of its producers, but

also by the national beliefs of its consumers, and the place in which it is consumed. French and English fashions, in particular, are arbitrary distinctions that the English claim to immediately recognize out of their nations of origin based on their established stereotypical implications of national fashions.

The French Invasion: William Thackeray's Fashionable Humbug

Before we can appreciate fully Becky Sharp's absolute awareness of women's abilities to construct themselves through fashion, we must appreciate fully Becky's absolute Frenchness, her absolute out-of-place-ness. Never once is the reader in doubt of Becky's nationality; indeed, the narrator and Becky herself remind us, again and again, of Becky's foreignness. When she leaves Miss Pinkerton's Academy with Amelia and in a defiant gesture tosses Dr. Johnson's Dictionary out of the carriage, she discusses her duties of speaking French with the other girls "until I grew sick of my mother-tongue" and how "talking French to Miss Pinkerton was capital fun" because "She doesn't know a word of French, and was too proud to confess it" (47). Becky believes that this, more than anything, "made her part with me; and so thank heaven for French. *Vive la France! Vive l'Empereur! Vive Bonaparte!*" (47). As the narrator reminds us, the recent Napoleonic Wars and the strife between England and France ensure that "in those days, in England, to say, 'Long live Bonaparte!' was as much to say, 'Long live Lucifer!'" (47). I quote at length from this particular passage in Thackeray's novel to demonstrate the lengths to which Becky goes to separate herself from her staid English companions; by declaring allegiance to Napoleon, even in jest,

Becky seemingly discounts the very realities of the war between England and France. At the same time, however, the little battles Becky waged with Miss Pinkerton in French also suggest that no one knows the effects of this national animosity more than Becky herself.³ Miss Pinkerton exploits the French heritage of her charge by subscribing to the beliefs of writers such as Linton that conflate Frenchness with franc-ness, and thus Frenchness with money. The orphan of an English father and a French mother, Becky is neither French nor English but both, and thus neither nation's citizens claim her as their own. Rather, Becky chooses to embrace one side of her heritage over the other, and by choosing her French heritage, she immediately is forced to separate herself from the English.

These early scenes also reveal the currency of the French language in early nineteenth-century England; Becky exploits her "mother-tongue" not only to mock her former employer, but also to earn her keep at Miss Pinkerton's Academy. After her father's death, Becky "was bound over as an articulated pupil; her duties being to talk French, as we have seen; and her privileges to live cost free" (39). "[H]er duties being to talk French" are only such because Becky is herself half-French; her Frenchness, then, becomes a commodity to be bought and sold, and Becky conducts those transactions herself. As the narrator reminds us, Becky has no mother to conduct such transactions for her. For Becky to sell her Frenchness, then, is for Becky to sell her self. Close proximity to Becky Sharp is close proximity to Frenchness, which reiterates the fear of contagion that we have seen in Cranford town. But this portable national currency, the "Frenchness" of Becky that can be attempted to be purchased or sold through language

lessons, offers cosmopolitanism for the students at Miss Pinkerton's Academy. When Ellis expresses her concern over the women of England being more and more influenced by foreign manners and modes, she is, in fact, expressing concern over the expanding fervor for the French language and French items sweeping the English nation, and the English desire to be influenced by foreign manners and modes. Patricia Marks argues that Becky makes those seditious statements revering Napoleon "as she begins her assault upon the world" and that these words highlight the hypocrisy of English attitudes towards the French and the French language because "the British have in reality lost the war by enthroning Napoleon at home linguistically" ("*Mon Pauvre Prisonnier*" 80). By revering the French language, and, by extension, French dress, style, and culture, the English have in fact sacrificed any idea of a solitary nationalism, untainted by those foreign ideals against which Ellis warns.

One of Becky's future in-laws, Rawdon Crawley's elderly, wealthy aunt Miss Crawley, is the novel's satirical example of the English citizen who has enthroned France, its language, foods, and culture to great extremes. She willingly participates in the free exchange of Frenchness, thereby treating an entire culture as a commodity that she can transport to England. Like Miss Matty's old beau in *Cranford*, Miss Crawley "had been in France [...] and loved, ever after, French novels, French cookery, and French wines. She read Voltaire, and had Rousseau by heart; talked very lightly about divorce, and most energetically of the rights of women" (130). In this brief scene, Miss Crawley appears as the culmination of the very worst fears England had about France's influence over Englishwomen; she enjoys the food, drink, and literature, and understands

and is opinionated about the prominent social issues plaguing England: divorce and women's rights. Eventually, like Miss Matty's beau, Miss Crawley dies from her love of France; while she does not waste away, the novel slyly suggests that her passion for rich foods and a scandalous lifestyle, two things that England associated with France, lead directly to her demise. Miss Crawley's adoration of France allows Becky access to Rawdon and the rest of the Crawleys, implying that enthroning France culturally as well as linguistically opens English homes to foreign social climbers such as Becky Sharp. This offers an infiltration of Frenchness not only in England but specifically in English homes and in English families.

While in Brussels, Becky Sharp Crawley attends the Opera with the new society afforded to her by her socially advantageous marriage. Not socially acceptable on her own grounds because she is half-French and viewed as a conniving social climber, Becky is, however, quite capable of conducting herself in a manner she sees as fit for her new class position and the new friends her position grants her. While many consider her "the nicest little woman in England," "honest old Dobbin" sees through Becky's disguise and recognizes "What a humbug that woman is!" (338). George Osborne, Amelia Sedley's husband and eventual would-be lover of Becky, dismisses the concept of "Humbug—acting!" (338) in Becky's character, because he cannot or will not see through Becky's pretense. Rather, like Amelia who becomes "overpowered by the flash and dazzle and the fashionable talk of her worldly rival" (338), George sees only the self that Becky puts on. Despite the naïveté of George, Amelia, and others, character and critic alike see through Becky's veneer and distinguish the artificiality that is at the core

of Becky's personality, her presentation, and her fashionability. Her penchant for acting, her seeming designation as a humbug bound by fashion and talk and worldliness all mask a woman whose real intentions, feelings, strengths, and weaknesses never are known throughout the novel. Instead Becky continuously is characterized by her nationality, her clothes, her playacting, and her sparkle. It seems that Becky is all "flash and dazzle" and no real substance.

Throughout Thackeray's novel, both the characters and the narrator emphasize Becky's artificiality again and again, and this excessive repetition underscores the nineteenth-century panic over a woman's artificiality and its signals of foreignness. She invents her own ancestors (48), she is "artful" (67), a "humbug" (338), and an actress (491) with "a habit of play-acting and fancy dressing" (612). She has neither name nor family to recommend her, and, as the narrator reminds us, no mother to husband-hunt for her, so she must master the hunt herself (57). While these accusations seem in step with a novel that proclaims itself "Without a Hero," the same accusations from literary critics seem almost extreme. She is painted as "an unscrupulous and greedy representative of the rising middle classes" (Zlotnick 57), the promoter of "female chicanery" (Jadwin 666), a "sirenlike heroine" (Dyer 197), and, most importantly for this study, "an artist" (Sheets 421). Robin Ann Sheets furthers the discussion of Becky's artifice and her artfulness by arguing that not only does Thackeray write Becky Sharp as an artist, but that Thackeray writes an entire novel about art (420), its deceit (421), and its potential for counterfeit (422) as well. Becky's designation as an "artist" calls forth her capacity for artful deceit, her construction of her family, her self, and her feelings which are all

part, as Sheets reminds us, of Becky's capacity for mimesis; the novel demonstrates, again and again, Becky's imitative skills and powers of performance (421).

To complicate the groundwork laid by Sheets' work, I believe we can take Becky's power of performance one step further and examine how her artistry, her artfulness, her performance, and her mimicry are all parts of herself that Becky enjoys. This ultimately is what is dangerous about Becky; she has mastered feminine secrets and has learned to enjoy her body. Becky, like Diana Warwick, has "the secret of dressing well" because she is French, and therefore has awareness of the seemingly mystical fashion knowledge supposedly unavailable to Englishwomen. But further, Becky Sharp is artificial because she chooses to be so; the reader never sees any sign that there is a real Becky beneath the façade of the performer, the flirtatious lover, the good wife, the social climber, the capricious friend, and the dozens of other roles that Becky plays throughout the novel. Like all good performances, these roles depend heavily on costume change to carry the weight of staged authenticity; or, as Patricia Marks reminds us, "Becky is nothing without her finery" (*Mon Pauvre Prisonnier* 82).

This assumption of the construction of Becky's character, that she is "nothing," in truth, "without her finery," is quite valid; this idea is further complicated by the realization that Becky's finery does not even belong to her. Throughout Thackeray's novel, fashion and women are presented as out of place; if Englishwomen are in Brussels, then fashion faux pas, out-of-date clothing, and elaborations in style are expected, as Chroniqueuse has reminded us. But Becky Sharp's out-of-placeness functions on several levels: she is a foreign woman out of country, a working woman out

of class, an actress out of theater, and a fashionable woman out of money. Still, despite these hardships, Becky remains constantly fashionable throughout the novel, and her fashionability is blamed constantly on her Frenchness and thus her artificiality. Becky's innate fashion sense, best seen through her talent for performance and engagement of sympathy, allow her to live well beyond her means throughout the greater part of the novel. While she is a governess for the Crawley children, she writes to Amelia to thank her for the hand-me-down dresses her friend bestowed upon her, and also, perhaps, to hint for more gifts such as these:

Your Indian muslin, and your pink silk, dearest Amelia, are said to become me very well. They are a good deal worn now; but, you know, we poor girls can't afford *des fraiches toilettes*. Happy, happy you! who have but to drive to St. James's Street, and a dear mother who will give you anything you ask. (139)

Through her acquaintance with Amelia, and her ability to garner sympathy from those around her, Becky has access to commodities heretofore unavailable to her, namely those treasured articles of Empire that in England's estimation, should belong solely to Englishwomen. She receives an "Indian muslin" from her friend, just as she received a "white Cashmere shawl" from Amelia a few months before (53). These hand-me-downs remove the authenticity of the meaning and weight of these imperial articles; while Amelia's argument to her mother for giving the shawl to her friend is quite simple—she has an excess of shawls, as "her brother Joseph just brought her two from India" (53)—it also is a reminder of the cashmere shawl's role in English society as the procurement of

imperial goods, brought home to English women, are part of the establishment of English middle-class womanhood. Becky's acquisition of the cashmere shawl and later, the Indian muslin, situates her precariously on the edge of an economic and class position otherwise unaffordable, but still very desirable. In short, Becky's access to fashionable things that carry cultural and economic resonance allows for the performance of the very things those cultural and economic resonances convey—social mobility, marriageability, and demureness—without benefit of possessing those desirable English traits. In wearing the shawl, she signals all that the shawl represents, but it is a sham because she did not own it to begin with. Despite this toehold of cultural power that the pink silk and Indian muslin afford Becky at this time in her colorful social career—indeed, they both “become her very well”—they still do not grant her authenticity; she does not dare call the objects hers, but rather, refers to the dresses to Amelia as “Yours.”

Throughout the novel, Becky seems to collect hand-me-downs and fashionable gifts the way she collects admirers: wholly selfishly and without regret. Miss Crawley, to acknowledge the fact that “Becky was the greatest comfort and convenience to her,” gives Becky “a couple of new gowns, and an old necklace and shawl” (176-77). Pitt Crawley gives her “a pretty diamond clasp, which confined a pearl necklace” (558), and Lord Steyne the “serpents, and rings, and baubles” which finally reveal the truth of his wife's misdeeds to Rawdon Crawley (620). All of these fashionable items, be they jewelry, shawls, or gowns, offer Becky the chance to dress herself in the signifiers of the wealthy and successful middle class; while she is but a “poor girl,” as she often reminds

Amelia and company, she has learned, above all else, that clothing makes the woman as well as the man. Further, Mr. and Mrs. Crawley exist almost entirely on money they do not actually possess, and Rawdon “vowed, with a great oath, that there was no woman in Europe who could talk a creditor over as [Becky] could. Almost immediately after their marriage, her practice had begun, and her husband found the immense value of such a wife” (265). Becky’s capacity for chicanery and artificiality serves her well as she manages the household debts; also, it allows her access to even more clothing than that which is given to her. Her newlywed husband buys “shawls, kid gloves, silk stockings, gold French watches, bracelets and perfumery” for his new wife with “blind love and unbounded credit” (197), as the Crawleys buy everything they wish. This subsistence on credit, living and purchasing with money that not only is not the buyer’s, but also barely can be considered real money at all, further positions Becky both as a fashionable woman of whom “Everybody in Vanity Fair must have remarked how well those live who are comfortably and thoroughly in debt,” and as a humbug, playing with clothes and dressing a part neither of which belongs to her (265).⁴

Becky’s wholehearted acceptance of hand-me-downs suggests that Becky understands the monetary value of fine clothing. Her understanding of clothing’s access to a certain social strata is apparent throughout the novel, but as Philippe Perrot submits, used clothing often was associated with resale, and its questionable origins (43) suggest a crass connection with money and exchange. Becky, as a woman of the world, would know the monetary value of used clothing, particularly items of fine make like the ones she receives. It is possible, therefore, that Becky uses the clothing to climb the social

ladder and to exchange for actual money. It is, as Perrot reminds us, “the only opportunity of elegance for those who could not afford the services of a tailor or dressmaker” (51). When Rawdon Crawley wholeheartedly supports Becky’s financial pragmatism on the eve of Waterloo by detailing the monetary worth of every article they possess, he in fact lends credence to the novel’s earlier suggestions of Becky’s self-commodification. He encourages her to hock their things in the event of his tragic death on the battlefield, and reminds his wife, “we must make the best of what we’ve got, Becky, you know” (350). Becky does not concern herself with life as a widow but instead “resumed honest Rawdon’s calculations of the night previous, and surveyed her position. Should the worst befall, all things considered, she was pretty well-to-do” (352). And she is: with her acquired jewels, gowns, on-loan horses and business know-how, Becky reasons that she “might reckon on six or seven hundred pounds at the very least, to begin the world with” (352-3). Becky’s awareness of money and her current financial situation is in no small part what differentiates her from Englishwomen. She knows the value of the cashmere shawls, and does not just give them away as Amelia does. Becky’s conquests are not limited to Rawdon’s devotion and her own manipulation of credit, however; she has made a “slave and worshipper” of General Tufto, who has, in turn, “made her many very handsome presents, in the shape of cashmere shawls bought at the auction of a French general’s lady” (352).⁵ Before her marriage to Rawdon, Becky had only one cashmere shawl to grant her access to middle-class respectability, and now, she has a surplus. Although their previous owner is a

general's "lady," or mistress, and a Frenchwoman at that, she seems, in the eyes of the society in *Vanity Fair*, a fitting predecessor to a social climber such as Becky.

I treat these examples at length because they exhibit Becky's complicated relationship with the articles of middle-class respectability, as well as her awareness of the accoutrements of class status. Becky Sharp understands how to construct artificially a socially acceptable self; Frenchwoman Becky Sharp understands this construction so well that she is highly successful at it. As Judith Law Fisher reminds us, Becky is an actress, a siren, and a dissembler, because she "create[s] the *appearance* of whatever inner state [she] wish[es] to reflect" (398, emphasis original) and like an artist, she must "sell herself to live [... and] alter herself to bring a higher price" (403). Becky has intimate knowledge of the artist's duty to "sell herself to live," as she began the novel selling her Frenchness to the headmistress and pupils of Miss Pinkerton's school. The furtive fashion knowledge nineteenth-century England associated with foreign women demonstrates both the anxiety over authenticity we see as a result of imperial expansion and the concern over servants or the working classes moving beyond just aping their "betters" to actually becoming successful members of higher social classes. In short, some people in England began to worry that they would not be able to recognize authentic members of the middle class if the servant class—and by extension, foreigners, as Becky Sharp embodies both—dressed the same as the class it is serving.⁶ Even as late as 1895, this issue is still a large concern for the middle class, and Fanny Douglas argues that "As a rule, the society woman drops a mode as soon as the suburban belle discovers it, and the suburban discards it as soon as 'Arriet lays hold of it' (7). Douglas presents

the dropped H of “‘Arriet” as representative of the Cockney (and therefore servant class) accent, but we can also read the dropped H as representative of the French accent, as well. In Becky’s case, both designations are on the same rung of the social ladder. An 1859 anonymous pamphlet entitled *Why Do the Servants of the Nineteenth Century Dress As They Do?* would perhaps argue that despite Becky Sharp’s French secret of dressing well, she still began life as a member of the lower classes, and

A servant with all her fine attire and mimicry of the dress of her mistress, can never succeed in making herself appear like a lady. Her walk, her manners, her mode of speaking prove what her position is [...]. [S]he exposes herself to the contempt of all right minded persons, who now despise her for the foolish attempt to appear what she is not, by dressing above her station, and who would greatly respect her did she simply keep the position in which God has placed her, by dressing according to it.

(vii)

The language of this passage would appear analogous to the language Ellis, Haweis, or Linton use to discuss the foreign women encroaching on English soil. The servant thus becomes the foreign woman, the mistress of the house the Englishwoman, and the implication that neither a servant nor a foreign woman can become a lady or disguise her true origin serves both mindsets. The fantasy is, of course, a fantasy; that one can identify a person’s class position and national origin through a woman’s “walk, her manners, her mode of speaking” is almost as far-fetched as the idea that if the same were to dress according to “the position” or nation “in which God has placed her,” then all

would be right with the English middle class.⁷ Tracts such as Douglas's serve to ease class anxieties under which the English middle class suffers, even as late as the 1890s.

Becky Sharp is a dangerous woman in Thackeray's novel because despite her nation of origin and her low station of birth, she moves within the middle class with ease and comfort; she marries Rawdon, solicits sexual advances and marriage proposals from several high-ranking members of English aristocracy, receives costly gifts from Englishmen that the narrator slyly suggests if "went to gentlemen's lawful wives and daughters, what a profusion of jewellery there would be exhibited in the genteelest homes of Vanity Fair!" (352), and, most importantly, conceives a child of mixed, English and French, blood. The novel suggests, as Victorian England seems to suspect, that Becky's Frenchness allows for such loose behavior around men, and that her half-French blood encourages adultery. When Becky reaches the pinnacle of her social climbing, however, she reaches the apex of her fashionable construction and her performative persona because the majority of the items she wears are, we can safely assume, bought new specifically for or by Becky Sharp.⁸ Because she owns the items of middle-class respectability and does not receive them secondhand, her constructed self is no longer a borrowed self. She is completely aware of every ring or bracelet, of every fold or bow, and of her construction of herself as a fashionable, worldly woman, and even the background coordinates with Becky's accoutrements. While seated with "a party of gentlemen around her" (444), Becky is observed in the candlelight by Lord Steyne:

[The candles] lighted up Rebecca's figure to admiration, as she sate on a sofa covered with a pattern of gaudy flowers. She was in a pink dress, that looked as fresh as a rose; her dazzling white arms and shoulders were half-covered with a thin hazy scarf through which they sparkled; her hair hung in curls round her neck; one of her little feet peeped out from the fresh crisp folds of the silk: the prettiest little foot in the prettiest little sandal in the finest silk stocking in the world. (445)

Becky sits on a floral-patterned sofa to match her pink dress that looked, fittingly, "fresh as a rose." The sofa and Becky match entirely too well, just as the candlelight hits her a bit too perfectly. But it is not just for the "ice and coffee [...], the best in London" that "the men came to her house to finish the night" (444); men like Lord Steyne come because Becky has displayed herself to utmost perfection. While the "candles lighted up Lord Steyne's shining bald head" and his "twinkling bloodshot eyes, surrounded by a thousand wrinkles," demonstrating every physical fault of the aristocrat, those same candles light instead Becky's "figure to admiration" (445).

In her own things, then, and in her own home, Becky is able to construct herself to her best advantage. By matching her clothing to her surroundings, by best situating herself in the candlelight, and by surrounding herself only with admirers, Becky ensures her social success among a small but elite crowd, a success dependent on her knowledge of fashion, and her ability to display her best features.⁹ The national danger here stems from Becky's knowledge and awareness of her artificiality, or, that French secret to which she has access; she has gained the admiration and attention of several Englishmen

precisely because she has constructed a beautiful and pleasing self. For Haweis, this knowledge of the artificiality of fashion undermines the inherent difference between English and French approaches to dress; as she argues, “the French have spoilt and vulgarised the notion of dress as an expression of character” (18) which “can result in nothing but a painful and revolting self-consciousness in any woman seeking to carry French notions into our purer English society” (22-23). Yet by the very nature of her argument, Haweis forces the same “moral significance” on clothing of which she accuses Frenchwomen. It seems, then, that Haweis’s “purer English society” has the same “painful and revolting self-consciousness” as French society. This seemingly contradictory stance to her previous arguments culminates in her final decree on the subject:

A woman may wear a dress many times without really knowing how the materials and folds mingle on her train. Far better so than that Englishwomen should come to attach the kind of importance to details attributed above to Frenchwomen; but best, were women to bring pure minds to bear with common sense on what they wear, and why they wear it, considering utility as well as ornament. (24)

Haweis calls for an ignorance of fashion, a natural assumption of clothing and style so that “pure minds” and “common sense” prevail both in the wearer and in the clothing she adorns. In short, Haweis asks for Englishwomen to rebuke the “French” style of dressing, that is wearing fashion with complete awareness of its artificial nature. In decrying the French for attaching “moral significance” to clothing, and yet calling

attention to the seeming immorality of Frenchwomen, she commits the very crime she writes against: Haweis herself is attaching moral significance to clothing. But as she does so to undermine Frenchwomen's morality and thus promote Englishwomen's, she either does not see or refuses to acknowledge the hypocrisy of her writings.

Thackeray's novel highlights the double-bind in Victorian England regarding fashionable women's clothing: to be fashionable, one must be aware of the fashions and the ideas they convey, but to be a good Englishwoman, one must pretend to be ignorant of the artificiality of fashion and persuade others of one's ignorance. When viewed with a Victorian understanding of fashion and national identification, it seems only logical that Becky Sharp, half French herself, would be obsessed with fashion. Thackeray's novel seems overly concerned with fashion as it details Becky's clothing again and again, particularly in discussions of Becky's stage-acting and tableau-constructing, and always in conjunction with her social climbing. The narrator says that "With regard to the world of female fashion and its customs, the present writer of course can only speak at second-hand" (440), yet the proliferation of second-hand accounts of the "world of female fashion and its customs" in the novel would argue differently. Becky's concerns with fashion are the concerns of an ambitious woman, and particularly, a dangerous one, as she manipulates fashion and the common understanding and interpretation of fashion to climb the social ladder. Becky Sharp is constructed as a dangerous woman throughout the novel because she knowingly constructs herself; she is aware of the artificial nature of fashion. As Ellen Bayuk Rosenman reminds us, in the nineteenth century, fashion was deemed dangerous because it was both artistic and sexually aware

(15); a woman's sophistication and self-construction in the arena of fashion speaks of secret initiations and rites. Becky not only understands this, she revels in it. She stages tableaux in which she is the star, the figure to be admired and fawned over by her male admirers, and her clothing speaks to these desires: she is admired and fawned over because she dresses to be so. But as *North and South* shows us, through the "ladies' business" of playing with shawls, fashion is for women, and is to be admired by women.¹⁰ Sharon Marcus argues that "those who sell fashion, like those who produce dolls, create simulacra of femininity not for men but for *women and girls* to scrutinize, handle, and consume. To market femininity to women is to use hyperfeminine objects to solicit a female gaze and to incite female fantasy" ("Reflections" 4, emphasis original). Marcus argues that the looking and looking back of feminine fashion is not grounded in hetero-eroticism but rather in homoeroticism. For Marcus, fashion is worn by women for the visual pleasure of other women.

This certainly holds true in Thackeray's novel, as it does in Gaskell's, but in *Vanity Fair*, this argument can be taken even further. The solicitation of a female gaze of which Marcus speaks is less the issue in *Vanity Fair* than the power of women to "scrutinize, handle, and consume." I believe that the marketing of femininity is not where the power of fashion lies in *Vanity Fair*, but rather, with women's consumption and the reading of fashion. Fashion is, as I argue, an arena to which women are relegated because it is seen as trivial. Becky's interest in dress and, most importantly, her use of dress prove this belief to be false; fashion is not a trivial realm, because it can be used to promote personal agendas, convey or assume national affiliation, or, in

Becky's case, to move within national class ranks. To counter this, the Victorian audience writes off fashionable know-how as simple foreign deception; true Englishwomen would not have such arcane and dangerous knowledge. Thackeray uses Becky to highlight the hypocrisy evident in these fears, and as I will later discuss, he uses Amelia to do the same.

Because fashionable women like Becky Sharp understand the artificiality of dress and the presentation of self for which it allows, they are familiar with both the consumption and interpretation of fashion. With their seemingly innate knowledge of fashion, or those foreign secrets of dressing well, women such as Becky are privy to skills, heretofore usually associated with men, of reading, interpreting, and consuming objects, texts, and, most importantly, women. Becky possesses, therefore, a small piece of masculine power; it is no wonder that she is usually in the company of men in the novel, for this reason, if not for her sexual misadventures. Marcus's argument focuses mainly on fashion's incitement of female fantasy as opposed to male fantasy or how best to complicate the assumption of "the literature on fashion [that] treats the Victorian period as exemplary of how clothing codes exploit a female sexuality defined by male desires" ("Reflections" 5). What Becky Sharp best demonstrates and what Thackeray's novel best implies is that women's fashion, and through it, constructions of self, are not dangerous only because they solicit the male or the female gaze; fashion is dangerous also because fashion is made to solicit any gaze at all.

The concepts of surveillance and spectacle as applied to literature are not new to Victorian studies or to fashion studies. Joanne Entwistle argues that fashion is about

discipline itself because the very idea of a fashionable arena creates a “mindful body” that always is aware of being seen; like the “mindful body” in Foucault’s theories regarding the Panopticon, from which Entwistle takes her theories, the body begins to regulate itself under the constant pressure of the possibility of the gaze (Entwistle 18). But more importantly, Entwistle argues for the fact that fashion gives people access to power: “Foucault’s notion of power can be applied to the study of dress in order to consider the ways in which the body acquires meaning and is acted upon by social and discursive forces and how these forces are implicated in the operation of power” (21). In this sense, then, fashion is powerful because it allows its wearer to convey meaning knowingly; fashionable knowledge, therefore, also allows access to power, because it allows for the understanding and interpretation of meaning. I believe that we can take Entwistle’s and Marcus’s arguments even further, and argue that Becky Sharp has the most access to power, socially, in Thackeray’s novel because her understanding of fashion gives her the opportunity to convey and to interpret meaning consciously.¹¹ Despite the fact that her social position ultimately remains precarious and fluctuating throughout the novel, her fashionable knowledge allows her to slip between social classes with ease. Even Becky’s fall from grace and social standing is done gracefully and with an eye toward clothing. It is in this sense of power, the power to write and the power to read, that Becky most demonstrates her out-of-placeness: because of her half-Frenchness, she has the feminine power to read women’s clothing, and because of her out-of-placeness, she has the masculine power to construct a self through her clothing.¹² In short, Becky Sharp is ever out-of-place precisely because she is too aware of being

out-of-place and of place being an issue for women, and thereby compensates, fashionably, for it.

Becky is seemingly never as out-of-place as she is when in England, and the women around her, those she would have as her social peers, are seemingly never as in-place as they are when at home, in England. Her very character, therefore, is most at home in those transitional, foreign places most uncomfortable for Englishwomen. After the characters return home from Brussels, the narrator reminds us that “there are ladies, who may be called men’s women, being welcomed entirely by all the gentlemen, and cut or slighted by all their wives” (440). When Becky prophesies that “the women will ask me [to participate in London society] when they find the men want to see me” (443), she negates the idea that middle-class women control and police their social strata more rigidly and stringently than middle-class men do. Nancy Armstrong argues in her landmark study *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* that middle-class women held power in the nineteenth century because they controlled the arena of “domestic surveillance” (19). This domestic surveillance expands to include all aspects of the domestic sphere, which rightly includes rigid parameters of social discourse and interaction. When the women of her acquaintance who accepted her abroad “not only declined to visit her when she came to this side of the Channel, but cut her severely when they met in public places” (441), they erect this rigid parameter of social interaction that prohibits artificial sirens like Becky Sharp from climbing up the slippery social ladder. These women literally retreat from Becky “a step or two” and gather their daughters to them “as if they would be contaminated by a touch of Becky”

(441). At this moment, they, too, have the power of the gaze seemingly heretofore only available to Becky, but their power lies in their conscious ability to ignore. While Lady Bareacres “stared at her little enemy,” the narrator notes that “To stare Becky out of countenance required a severer glance than even the frigid old Bareacres could shoot out of her dismal eyes” (441). The language of “seeing” and the use of “eyes” as a means of recognition continues throughout this passage: even Lady de la Mole “was quite blind, and could not in the least recognize her former friend” when she passes Becky in the park (441). These domestic surveillances, as best demonstrated by the protection and policing of the middle-class social strata, are particularly important when one remembers the scene in which they occur. These women accepted Becky in Brussels, when they all were out-of-place; now, returned across the Channel, back in-place again, Becky is once more situated outside the pale.¹³

But just as Becky is never as out-of-place as she is in England, she is never as in-place as she is in Brussels. Thackeray’s novel satirizes the differences between Englishwomen’s and Frenchwomen’s approaches to fashion in one particular scene, the confrontation of Becky Sharp Crawley and Amelia Sedley Osborne at the infamous June 15th, 1815 Brussels ball the night before the Company is called off to war. This ball has been discussed greatly in criticism and history for its impact on the soldiers and its proximity to warfare, but like Thackeray’s narrator’s, our place is with the non-combatants.¹⁴ For Becky Sharp, the ball represents the best of such shining moments for her; her utter grasp of fashion, of self-construction through clothing, and of those stylish secrets to which she and not Amelia is privy allow her to construct a self that is, without

a doubt, the belle of the ball. The narrator tells us that while Amelia's "appearance was an utter failure," Becky Sharp's "*debut* was, on the contrary, very brilliant. She arrived very late. Her face was radiant; her dress perfection" (342). She is swarmed by men and gossiped about by women, who "agreed that her manners were fine, her air *distingué*" (342), two points that Becky proves complete falsities when she walks over to Amelia and "finish[es] the poor child at once" (342). Becky's shining moment is dependent not on the clothes that she is wearing, but rather on her reading and her consumption of the clothes other women are wearing; she reads Amelia's dress as an artificial covering of awkwardness and discomfort: "Mrs. Rawdon ran and greeted affectionately her dearest Amelia, and began forthwith to patronize her. She found fault with her friend's dress, and her hairdresser, and wondered how she could be so *chaussée*, and vowed that she must send her *corsetière* the next morning" (342). And as if this long reprimand was not enough, Becky then "left her bouquet and shawl by Amelia's side, and tripped off with George to dance" (343). When Becky reads Amelia's ball dress, she reads not only Amelia's inability to wear fashionable clothing, but also her inability to dress herself in appropriate and flattering clothing. She sees through Amelia's façade of clothing to her corset; by offering to send her *corsetière*, Becky takes her reading even further to state that Amelia, not only her clothing, is a cause for fashionable crisis. Most importantly, she sees Amelia's clothing as a façade. By calling attention to Amelia's poorly-worn corset, Becky calls attention to Amelia's figure, the actual body beneath the clothed body on display for the attendees of the ball. That figure is not disguised by the corset Amelia wears; by reading this moment of Amelia's body, Becky reads Amelia as

wanting. Becky understands that the body should be disguised by the corset and is not; she recognizes Amelia's unfashionable presentation as the artificial presentation it is.

I quote this passage at length because this scene functions as the crux of the nineteenth-century fashionable argument highlighted in Thackeray's novel: there is a distinct difference between Englishwomen and Frenchwomen that is seemingly recognizable not only through what they wear but how well they wear it. At this moment, Becky's utter artificiality and Amelia's utter naiveté are nowhere better seen. Becky's power in and knowledge of fashion allow for her perfect dress and radiant face, but further, her fashionable knowledge lends itself perfectly to her evaluation of Amelia. In a discussion of snobbery and consumerism in *Vanity Fair*, Joseph Litvak argues that "in a marketplace mobbed with cool customers, the successful consumer must be able conspicuously to consume not just commodities but other consumers; or—to put it more tastefully—she must consume the *consumption* of other consumers" (63, emphasis original). Becky is, above all else, a successful consumer. Her power lies in artificiality and in recognition, in that secret French knowledge of dress that she possesses, and in her subversive ability to read, consume, and interpret. At the Brussels' ball, Becky not only reads but consumes, and as Litvak reminds us, she not only consumes but consumes consumption; in addition to being a siren, a serpent, and a humbug, Becky becomes, in this moment, a succubus, feeding on fashion faux pas. She is able to suck the life and shine out of Amelia's evening, and all because "Women only know how to wound so" (Thackeray 343). She understands that Amelia is just as artificially constructed as she is. The irony of this moment is that Amelia, an Englishwoman, is constructed poorly.

In Thackeray's novel, the "women only know how to wound so" because fashion is relegated to a particularly feminine arena in the nineteenth century; Amelia's debut at the ball is in part so unsuccessful because George, and not Amelia, constructs her ball dress. The novel exemplifies the disastrous results of letting men handle, supervise, and oversee women's fashion; or, as the narrator reminds us, "A man can no more penetrate or understand those mysteries [of fashion] than he can know what the ladies talk about when they go upstairs after dinner" (440). The narrator identifies fashion as a mystery exclusively contained within women's province. The comparison to ladies' after-dinner talk ensures that fashion would be seen as the same sort of secret gendered sphere as it is in the opening scenes of Gaskell's *North and South*. Ellen Bayuk Rosenman argues that "Despite its reputation as a women's-only preserve, fashion emerged in the nineteenth century as a battleground between the sexes. At issue was the question of who possessed superior authority over and knowledge of female beauty" (13). Masculine suspicion over fashion's relegation to "a women's-only preserve" speaks to continuous fears of female-exclusive space or domains; in short, because fashion often is associated with women, its purpose and its validity are suspect and in need of masculine control.

Thackeray's novel demonstrates that men do not possess "superior authority over and knowledge of female beauty," despite beliefs and claims to the contrary. Women's connection with fashion, particularly French fashion, is with furtive knowledge as well as with sexuality. Men's connection with men's fashion other than military uniforms is of effeminacy, and the connection with women's fashion is one of failure. The men in Thackeray's novel, it seems, can never triumph in the fashionable arena. Much has been

written on Jos Sedley and his ostentatious style and ravenous appetite for style, food, and clothing. In particular, works by Miles Lambert, Christoph Lindner, and Joseph Litvak mark Jos's role in the novel as a dandy, a consummate consumer, and a bon vivant, respectively.¹⁵ But almost all critical discussions of Jos Sedley depend on his buffoonery and outlandishness to make their points regarding men's awareness—or lack thereof—of the consumer marketplace, when in fact other male characters in the novel dabble in fashion as well, and fail utterly because they attempt to control and dictate the statutes of women's fashion rather than their own.

The men in Thackeray's novel are overwhelmingly military; even before the Company turns its sights towards Brussels, Rawdon Crawley, William Dobbin, and George Osborne are already military men. While military uniforms have a direct and recognizable connection with the nation from which they hail and therefore are never suspect for their connection to nationalism, their connection to fashion is perhaps a bit more complex. Jennifer Craik reminds us that "Codes associated with uniforms are highly elaborated and precise, indicating fine graduations of status, rank, role, occupation, character and performativity" (130); the uniform, by this equation, is symbolic in its own right.¹⁶ It can indicate role and status, but further, the uniform suggests "character and performativity"; to see the uniform, then, is to see not the person but the military man. Part of this instant recognition of man by uniform is recognition of a disciplined man; this discipline is usually associated with military training, but also can be associated with the disciplining powers of the uniform itself.¹⁷ Like Frenchwomen, these Englishmen are seen as constructed through clothing, but as that clothing

represents military discipline and not female vanity, they are not seen as artificial in the same way.

Above all else, the uniform defines display and spectacle; both national and personal, the uniform is easily identifiable and also easily eroticized. One need only think of the Bennet girls in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* as well as Amelia and Becky in *Vanity Fair* to see the sexual excitement these fictional women experience at the sight of a man in uniform.¹⁸ *Vanity Fair*, in particular, enjoys displaying the military man. In an article on eighteenth-century Prussian soldiers, Daniel Purdy offers insight into this English novel's portrayal of the soldier's form: "Readers of society novels such as Thackeray's [sic] *Vanity Fair* will recall scenes in which soldiers, particularly officers, paraded around ladies in tight uniforms which showed their musculature" (23). This connection between the uniform and eroticism, between masculine display and sexual interest, has not only a heterosexual but also a decidedly homosocial bent as well. Before the regiment leaves for Brussels, Jos arrives at the honeymoon inn to accompany his sister and her husband away. In front of the inn, Jos

recognized [...] the friendly countenance of Captain Dobbin, who had been pacing the street for an hour past in expectation of his friends' arrival. The Captain, with shells on his frock-coat, and a crimson sash and sabre, presented a military appearance, which made Jos quite proud to be able to claim such an acquaintance, and the stout civilian hailed him with a cordiality very different from the reception which Jos vouchsafed to his friend in Brighton and Bond Street. (316)

Jos, too, suffers from the sense of out-of-placeness that will eventually affect the women accompanying the regiment in his shift from his usual Bond Street greeting. But Jos's enthusiasm for his friend is dependent not on social strata but rather on the old adage: the clothes make the man. Dobbin, in his military finest, cuts a striking figure, and Jos, as a loyal patriot and an employee of Empire in his post as the Collector of Boggley-Woolah, cannot help but be impressed by this display of national potency and power. Further, as the "obtuse style queen" (Litvak 56) of the novel, Jos appreciates Captain Dobbin on a wholly new level than before; Dobbin, as an impressive military figure, steals the admiration of at least one Sedley.

While the uniform is important to a discussion of men's fashion, and, in particular, a discussion of men's fashion in *Vanity Fair*, it is not as important to the crises of female artificiality under discussion in this chapter. There are several moments in which Thackeray's novel pays as much attention to male attire as it does to female, but very few of these moments have anything to do with choice. The uniform, by its very nature, contradicts most discussions of fashionable choice because it is a required and oftentimes provided set of clothing that is essential to the job performed. The moments in the novel in which men's fashion plays an important role occur when the men are not in uniform, but rather, in their everyday street clothes. George Osborne, for example, believes he is "a woman-killer and destined to conquer" (340) several ladies, including Mrs. Crawley, and the attention he pays towards his street dress still reflects a decidedly military bent.¹⁹ When he meets with Dobbin to determine how best to elope with Amelia, he "came into the coffee-room, looking very haggard and pale; although

dressed rather smartly in a blue coat and brass buttons, and a neat buff waistcoat of the fashion of those days” (256). What George and Dobbin best demonstrate, then, is that a man is never as well-dressed as he is in military finest, and if not military finest, then military style will do just as well. We know this “blue coat and brass buttons” is not only stylish but also appealing to the fairer sex because we see it in another book set during the early nineteenth century: *Cranford*. When Miss Matty rediscovers her old beau Thomas Holbrook in a shop where she and Mary have gone to examine the new colored silks, Holbrook himself is shopping as well, for new gloves, while wearing “a blue coat with brass buttons, drab breeches, and gaiters” (30). The military style, so close to an actual uniform but not exact, was extremely popular in the nineteenth century for both men and women. The signifier of this style—brass buttons, colors such as navy blue—suggest the very things military uniforms represent without conveying precise uniformity.²⁰ Military style, then, is a way to proclaim national loyalty without performing any actions that might put the wearer at risk, like going to war.²¹

While military-style clothing found its way into women’s hearts and wardrobes in the nineteenth century, this fashion remains, for the most part, the province of men, the same as women’s fashion, as Thackeray’s novel suggests, should remain the province of women. Amelia’s failure is not due to her fashionable tastes, but rather, her husband’s. It is George and not Amelia who has “commanded new dresses and ornaments of all sorts” for Mrs. Osborne for the ball (341), and it is George who feels “with a sort of rage” Amelia’s appearance as “an utter failure” (342). George believes that “he had behaved very handsomely in getting her new clothes” (342), but in fact, the

clothes he has acquired for his wife lead to her ridicule and scorn at the hands of Becky Sharp. Even further, Amelia herself cannot function comfortably or fashionably in dress acquired by her husband because at this moment in the text, Amelia is blindingly and completely artificial. Unable even to construct her own sense of being, to construct her own artificiality, she cannot shine. This scene and its acknowledgment of fashion's artificiality not only for foreign women such as Becky Sharp but also for Englishwomen such as Amelia Sedley demonstrates fashion's artificiality across national lines. What we see in the character foils of Becky Sharp and Amelia Sedley is a nationalistic double-standard; the Englishwoman and her knowledge of fashion and style cannot be proclaimed to be artificial, as to do so would be to acknowledge Englishwomen's understanding of the artificiality of style. Fashion is both artificial and expressive, and by allowing George to dress her, Amelia does not express herself, and in turn, reveals even more artificiality. Yet by its very construction, "naturalness" is learned, and therefore there is no such standard as "natural" style; all that remains is artificial naturalness.

To be a fashionable success, then, is to be artificial; there is no "natural" style, despite English claims to the contrary. What remains important to the English audience is whether that artificiality is evident. What Thackeray's novel seems to argue—and indeed, what many Victorian novels and fashion tracts seem to argue—is that while artificiality is an undesirable trait, women can *learn* to seem natural. Ultimately, despite England's panicked insistence to the contrary, there is no difference between the way French and English women approach fashion. *Vanity Fair* sets up a dichotomy between

Becky and Amelia, and thus the dichotomy between French and English and between artificial and natural, and it calls attention to the artifice of all fashionable persons and personas. When English writers claim “naturalness” for their countrywomen, they are in fact whitewashing artificiality and removing agency from a woman’s understanding of fashion and her own body. Englishwomen should be natural because they should be symbolic representations of a national ideology that prides itself on the modesty and natural beauty of its women. If Amelia’s “naturalness,” discussed throughout Thackeray’s novel, is a version of Becky’s artifice, then the designation of “natural” is a false one. Thackeray’s novel emphasizes Victorian England’s concerns over the artificiality of women as well as its subsequent relegation of such artificiality to the French; Frenchwoman Becky Sharp is an artifice, a sham, because England needs her to be so.

In the next section of this chapter, I argue that Becky’s “artifice” and Amelia’s “naturalness” are in fact two versions of the same performance of femininity and womanhood, what Judith Butler would call the “*stylized repetition of acts*” that constitute the construction of gendered identity (179, emphasis original). As Becky performs fashionable womanhood perfectly, so, too, does Amelia perform unfashionable womanhood. Thackeray’s novel presents Amelia as unfashionable and thus unaware of how best to construct a beautiful self artificially; this ignorance of fashion is written in Victorian England as an ideal of middle-class womanhood. But it, too, is false, because Amelia’s seemingly “natural” beauty and ignorance of fashion is as constructed and as learned as Becky’s fashion know-how. That is to say, as Becky is the coquette, Amelia

is the innocent girl; both are performances Victorian society teaches its women through constant repetition of the archetypes, and Amelia and Becky, unknowingly or not, learn their roles and perform them well.

The “Natural” Englishwoman: William Thackeray’s Unfashionable Darling

In his 1855 tract *A Hint from Modesty to the Ladies of England on the Fashion of Low-Dressing*, Frederick Audax urges Englishwomen not to be swayed by the lure of fashion and her many artifices. He argues that artifices are “unworthy” of the women of England (iv), particularly because,

An English woman! Who can tell her praise? Who can even most faintly trace all her excellencies? To say that she is a pattern to every country blessed with civilization, is to say nothing that is not in course. [...]
And how beautiful! All fair and all lovely she is! In her the North and the South meet, drop every blemish, and unite their beauties in a model of Nature! (7)

Audax’s praise of the Englishwoman is remarkably similar to the praise we have seen from Douglas, Ellis, and Haweis; Audax claims that Englishwomen are “a pattern to every country blessed with civilization,” and that their domesticity, generosity, and modesty (7) are unparalleled. But Audax also takes his praise beyond his countrywomen’s superior inner qualities to call attention to their outer beauty. In Audax’s opinion, the Englishwoman is the result of the unification of “the North and South” into a “model of Nature.” For the author, Englishwomen’s beauty is dependent

on the beauty of Nature; by calling attention to geographical regions and by claiming that Englishwomen's beauty is formed by the melding of two such regions' ideals, Audax claims for Englishwomen a superior power that creates their beauty. They have no need for artifice and fashion to make their outward appearance appealing, as any appeal they may have is a gift from Nature. With this belief and the others like it we have seen, natural beauty is all that a good society, and therefore a good England, desires. The question remains, then, why Amelia Sedley, representative of all of these good English qualities, is a social failure, and Becky Sharp, reviled so often for her artificiality and written as the antithesis of the good English woman Audax and others claim to desire, is a social success. Thackeray portrays Becky as accomplished in everything Victorian society claimed for their women, and while that society loves her, it also dismisses her as false and artificial; Amelia, however, is portrayed as natural and unconscious of how to construct a fashionable self, and in Victorian England's estimation, she should therefore be a success. Yet she is still an utter social and fashionable disaster. Ultimately, Thackeray's novel exposes Victorian standards of womanhood to be as artificial as it claims the antithesis of its standards is.

Becky Sharp fulfills every obligation regarding the art of conversation, beauty, and dress set forth by fashion tracts and manners texts such as Ellis's *The Women of England* or Mary Haweis' *The Art of Beauty*, yet despite it all, the text marks her as foreign, as a "humbug," and as artificial.²² Ellis tells her readers that "Women have the choice of many means of bringing their principles into exercise, and of obtaining influence, both in their own domestic sphere, and in society at large. Amongst the most

important of these is **conversation**" (119, emphasis original), a charge with which Becky Sharp most happily complies. Miss Crawley, Rebecca's benefactor and champion prior to her marriage to Rawdon, declares "little Miss Sharp" to be "the only person fit to talk to in the country!" (141). Most of Becky's charm comes from her penchant for mimicry, and Miss Crawley "laughed heartily at a perfect imitation of Miss Briggs and her grief, which Rebecca described to her" (171). But even Becky Sharp's acting and conversational skills cannot withstand the assault of Amelia Sedley "who came forward so timidly and so gracefully" with a "sweet blushing face" to meet Miss Crawley that the elderly lady declares her "charming" and spoke of her "with rapture half-a-dozen times that day" (178). It is not Amelia's conversational skills or play-acting that infatuates Miss Crawley, but rather the grand lady's "good taste. She liked natural manners—a little timidity only set them off" (178). For Miss Crawley, Amelia's appeal lies in her "natural manners" and "timidity," two traits that, it would seem, are inherent. Yet as the existence of so many conduct and fashion tracts attest, manners and style are learned; it is important, therefore, for a woman to learn to appear unaware of this knowledge. Even Ellis would agree with this equation, as *The Women of England* is written specifically for those "who, on the one hand, enjoy the advantages of a liberal education, and, on the other, have no pretension to family rank" (19), that is, women who have moved upwards in society without the benefit of a juvenile education in the manners and customs of the upper-middle class of English society. With her text, Ellis attempts to teach these women how to exist in their new class position through

discussions of proper dress, manners, the art of conversation, and social and personal duties.

Amelia Sedley Osborne succeeds as the ideal woman England believes it wants and has precisely because she fails as a fashionable woman. Her shyness, demureness, selflessness, blush, and “natural” beauty and manners are every trait English fashion and manners tracts value and recommend. Even contemporary literary critics fall sway under Amelia’s gentle awkwardness and see it as the consequence of nature alone, rather than a combination of nature and education. Judith Fisher, for example, argues that “Amelia’s appearance is the consequence of her own nature” in that her eyes, skin, lips, and good humor create a physique as well as a personality (400). For Fischer, Amelia’s appearance is directly correlated not only to the features with which she was born, but also with her “good humor” and “own nature.” Robin Ann Sheets reminds us that “As often as Becky is called artful, Amelia is called artless; the word refers to both her innocence and her ineptitude” (423) as Thackeray’s novel presents her. Amelia’s innocence often is revealed in her downcast eyes or her blushing face; her ineptitude, however, speaks to an ignorance that does not seemed learned. For Amelia, to be inept is not to understand the fashionable world around her but rather to allow George to do for her, and thus to be the center of George’s attention, even for a little while. She is a sympathetic character, albeit seemingly unwillingly and unwittingly, because she has failed her social womanly duty so completely. This fashionable failure can be read as a “natural” mistake by a Victorian audience; it takes place because Amelia seemingly cannot construct artificiality. In the world Thackeray creates, as well as the world in

which he writes, artfulness is contrasted with artlessness, as France is contrasted with England, and as Becky's supposed artifice is contrasted with Amelia's supposed naturalness in order to demonstrate the similarities and not the differences between England's assumptions about its women and the women of other nations.

For both women, however, the argument that pits artifice versus naturalness is wholly dependent on recognition by the English reading—and viewing—public. The novel's presentation of Englishwoman Amelia Sedley and Frenchwoman Becky Sharp relies heavily on national stereotypes with particular regard to fashion. Becky's artificiality, demonstrated by her existence on credit, her hand-me-down clothes, and her humbuggery, stands in sharp contrast to Amelia's "natural" manners, naiveté, and unawareness of fashion. Becky's constant successes in the fashionable world are dependent on men and foreign women rather than on good Englishwomen. When she and Rawdon go to Paris, the narrator notes that "Her success in Paris was remarkable. All the French ladies voted her charming. She spoke their language admirably. She adopted at once their grace, their liveliness, their manner" (412). Becky's fashionability relies not only on her talent for mimicry and art, but also on her adaptability. In England, and among the Englishwomen in Brussels, Becky imitates their fashions and manners; among the French, Becky does the same. It is important to note here that Becky does not fall back on a supposedly natural racial instinct for French grace, liveliness, or manner, as Mary Haweis might argue that she inherently has. Rather, she adopts her current society's manners and customs, and for this, is considered "the gayest and most admired of Englishwomen" (413). Becky's talent for reading and consuming

fashion, coupled with her mastery of staging, allow her to mimic the women of her acquaintance. In this sense, then, she reads the society around her not only for what its citizens are, but also for what they expect their outsiders to be. As a result, in England, Becky is most assuredly French, while in France, she is most assuredly English, precisely because she reads French expectations for the English, and English expectations for the French. The fact that she can claim no country as her own in a social setting lends itself to her cosmopolitanism, and reinforces the image of Becky as “a most artful and dangerous person” (413). She understands how to construct a personal and a national self, but she does it too well in England; Becky is free of any of the awkward gestures and innocence that Amelia possesses. This perfection of presentation, a self too put together, is what ultimately marks Becky as French.

Amelia, in contrast, is “the best, the kindest, the gentlest, the sweetest girl in England” according to George Osborne (253), and while this praise is exaggerated, it is important in its qualifications. In England, Amelia is indeed ranked among the kindest and gentlest of girls, because in England, Amelia is valued and praised for her submission and demureness. But as we see at the beginning of *Vanity Fair*, all of these traits can be learned as well as inherited, the same as style, deportment, manners, and carriage can. Amelia’s first introduction in the novel is not through appearance but rather through her headmistress’s letter to her parents:

“Those virtues which characterise the young English gentlewoman, those accomplishments which become her birth and station, will not be found wanting in the amiable Miss Sedley, whose *industry* and *obedience* have

endeared her to her instructors, and whose delightful sweetness of temper has charmed her *aged* and her *youthful* companions.” (40, emphasis original)

The English virtues for which Amelia is most praised are her industry and obedience, and her temper and amiability have made her a favorite among the school, but her “*deportment and carriage*, so requisite for every young lady of *fashion*” are found in need of work (40, emphasis original). While Amelia’s “industry and obedience”—two personal aspects of her character—are praised, her fashionability and presentation of self are found wanting. Yet while Ms. Pinkerton gives instructions on how to solve this deficit in Amelia’s character—use of the backboard for “four hours daily during the next three years” (40)—never once does she suggest that Amelia cannot *learn* to acquire “that dignified *deportment and carriage*.” What Ms. Pinkerton’s letter suggests instead is that such signifiers of fashionable awareness are, in fact, learned, and not inherited; in short, Ms. Pinkerton acknowledges the artificiality of fashionable women. The fact that Amelia has not learned this pretense of sophistication and fashion suggests that she is free from artifice, and throughout the novel, this supposed lack of artifice and understanding of manipulation leads to Amelia’s heartbreaks again and again. The narrator notes that rarely in life and in fiction are we “to have for a constant companion so guileless and good-natured a person” (43) as Amelia. Her companion Becky Sharp, however, is neither guileless nor good-natured, and her awareness of the creation of one’s self through the vehicle of fashion seemingly lends credence to Haweis’s arguments regarding the artifice of Frenchwomen.

Miss Pinkerton argues that Amelia's obedience is one of the virtues of good Englishwomen, and such virtues lend to the construction of Amelia's beauty and manners as natural. But that very obedience is in fact what causes Amelia's fashionable declines throughout the novel. With the Misses Osborne, who treated her with "extreme kindness and condescension, and patronized her so insufferably," Amelia is struck dull and dumb because "She made efforts to like them, as in duty bound, and as sisters of her future husband" (147). Amelia's sense of duty prevents her from forming opinions of her own; rather, her "natural manners," those taught to her at Miss Pinkerton's and like those in which Sarah Stickney Ellis instructs her readers, in truth prevent Amelia from acting naturally. When the sisters take Amelia "to the ancient concerts by way of a treat," Amelia "did not dare be affected by the hymn the children sang" (147). It is this repression of her true natural feelings—the artificial naturalness that causes Amelia to "shrink and hide" her true feelings (150)—that causes Maria Osborne to say, with perfect falsity, that Amelia is "the best-natured and most unaffected young creature" (148).

Amelia is just as affected as Becky, or as the Misses Osborne, or as any other woman in the novel, despite the veneer of naturalness she possesses. Mrs. O'Dowd declares that Amelia, "a natural and unaffected person, had none of that artificial shamefacedness which her husband mistook for delicacy on his own part" (327), although, in truth, she does. Amelia's presentations of innocence appear more natural, but are in fact just as artificial. When her family teases her about George Osborne, Amelia, "hanging down her head, blushed as only young ladies of seventeen know how

to blush” (67). This posturing presents Amelia as modest and humble, but it, too, is a learned response of modesty and humility. Even her blush, labeled as secretive knowledge only available to “young ladies of seventeen,” appears a triggered response to the mention of her young gentleman; “young ladies of seventeen,” on the marriage market and aware of the effect of their appearances on the male public, would understand the effect of those blushes, as well.²³ The “artificial shamefacedness” that is not as evident on Amelia is rather heavy-handed on Becky Sharp. At Becky’s first dinner with the Sedleys, Becky’s “artificial shamefacedness” is dependent on her “holding her green eyes downwards,” on her white gown, and on her “bare shoulders as white as snow” all creating “the picture of youth, unprotected innocence, and humble virgin simplicity” (60). Becky’s “picture of youth” is in truth a picture; it is a projection constructed by Becky’s artfulness and her ability to best portray the attributes her audience desires.

For Amelia, “naturalness” is simply another learned artificiality; her artlessness is just as constructed as Becky’s artfulness. Where the difference lies between the two is in the fact that Amelia believes her naturalness is genuine; she remains unconscious of the fact that she has learned to act naturally. Amelia has no more idea that she is behaving in an artificial manner than the Misses Osborne have. Those “good virtues” and “authenticity” for which Amelia is praised and to which she aspires are the desired traits for the Victorian female population. The furtive knowledge that Englishwomen possess regarding their naturalness and genuine innocence could perhaps be called the secret of dressing poorly—in the English style, which we see most often in details of

English foreign travel. In her 1895 work *The Gentlewoman's Book of Dress*, Fanny Douglas discusses the proper use of fashion both home and abroad and, in particular, instructs that particular breed of Englishwoman: the woman on tour. She states,

And here seems the most fitting place to insert a few words of entreaty to women who travel abroad. Let their 'travel appear rather in their discourse than their apparel.' The Englishwoman abroad is a favourite object of derision amongst foreigners. Matters are improving, and the number of unattractive females in gauze veils, chamois gloves, and ill-made tweeds is considerably smaller, but the race is not yet extinct. (65-66)

Even a century after the rise of middle-class tourism began,²⁴ the Englishwoman abroad was distinguishable from her foreign counterpart, and her manner and mode made her “a favourite object of derision among foreigners.” Douglas offers a solution to this mockery when she urges her countrywomen to “Let their ‘travel appear rather in their discourse than their apparel.’” She does not focus on the dichotomy of accents or language; in fact, she urges women to let their speech rather than their clothing denote their country of origin.²⁵ Both Douglas and the foreign citizens in these countries recognize Englishwomen not by their voice or manner or mode, but rather by their distinctive “travel dress.”²⁶

By dressing poorly abroad, Englishwomen call attention to two things: their nation of birth, and their “natural” beauty. Undistracted by the fashionable “flash and substance” that Becky Sharp might wear, people can best discover Englishwomen’s

physical beauty which is, of course, granted to them by the sheer accident of birth.

Chroniqueuse argues that

How plain, alongside of these [Frenchwomen], appear English girls, who, with ten times more natural beauty, seem so ugly with their poke bonnets, ugly and coarse stuff gowns that cling to the figure, while the little short jackets add to the uncouthness of the *tout ensemble*! ‘As badly dressed as an *Anglaise*,’ has got to be a proverb among the Parisians; and surely they are right. (157)

To Chroniqueuse, English girls appear “plain” alongside their fashionable French sisters, despite possessing “ten times more natural beauty.” To an English reading public, however, these girls are triumphant in their appearance abroad, as their beauty is not diminished or overshadowed by the flounces and petticoats, the artful construction that fashion—particularly French fashion—demands.

The small fashionable success that Amelia enjoys in the novel occurs only during moments when she is unencumbered by fashionable surveillance, namely, those few short weeks of her honeymoon before the Crawleys join the regiment and Becky outshines Amelia’s small social victories. Her seeming selflessness is, in these early moments of marriage, in fact subsumed under the “little treat” she allows herself of being “obedient to her husband’s orders” that she “purchase everything requisite for a lady of Mrs. George Osborne’s fashion” (313). In this moment of apparent obedience to her husband’s demands, Amelia succumbs to “traditional” feminine pursuits and proves herself not “at all above the pleasure of shopping, and bargaining, and seeing and buying

pretty things” (313). As Amelia experiences true pleasure at these feminine pursuits she also exhibits her innate fashion know-how; while the shopfolks’ compliments regarding Amelia’s “great deal of taste and elegant discernment” may be overblown, they do recognize the taste that Amelia has learned but rarely puts forth correctly. In short, Amelia’s taste and discernment, while no more natural than Becky’s, are in this moment actually used, and are found if not superior than at least equal to that of her governess friend. Amelia’s confidence in her attractiveness as a woman, bolstered by her recent marriage to her beloved and the attention she has received from men and women alike, transmits itself into fashionable confidence as well. In these honeymoon moments, Amelia is free both to be beautiful and to be the center of attention, two freedoms with which Becky Sharp always is comfortable.

On the honeymoon tour, Amelia “Joins *Her* Regiment” and in truth she possesses George’s company with “Her simple, artless behavior, and modest kindness of demeanour” (316, emphasis added). When “It became the fashion, indeed, among all the honest young fellows of the –th, to adore and admire Mrs. Osborne” (316) Amelia finds herself with “a little triumph, which flushed her spirits and made her eyes sparkle” (321). This triumph that flushes Amelia’s spirits seems to translate to her face, as well; her social successes bring a healthy blush to her cheeks and shine to her eyes. In Chatham, Amelia is her most natural self not only because she is happy in her marriage to George, but also because she is unconcerned with the approval of her female peers. Peggy O’Dowd’s adoration of Amelia assures that the young bride always will receive approval from the matron. Further, their differences in age, nation, and class allow for Amelia’s

dominance; as a young, English, middle-class bride, she is expected to receive admiration from an older, Irish, working-class matron. Amelia experiences the pleasant position of darling, and she wears it well. Unencumbered, then, by judgmental female surveillance, the kind with which Becky deflates her at the Waterloo Ball, Amelia is radiant to her English audience of soldiers and their wives. As the characters in Thackeray's novel go "not so much to a war as to a fashionable tour" (313), they bring with them their nation; even the Opera "was almost like Old England. The house was filled with familiar British faces, and those toilettes for which the British female has long been celebrated" (334). Amelia's successes are dependent on the reading of common British men and women, rather than the fashionable ladies who take their cues from Paris because Amelia embodies those virtues on which England so prides itself. Traveling abroad with her husband and his regiment, she becomes an ambassador of the best and the brightest that England has to offer the world. Her charming modesty and devotion to her husband reinforces the portrayal of Englishwomen as patriotic mothers, wives, and daughters who devote their lives to the support and betterment of England and her men.

Even before the final judgments of *Vanity Fair*, Becky and Amelia remain separated by nation, by manner, and by artifice. After the famous Charade-night in which Becky performs the role of Clytemnestra, Pitt Crawley, in a pique of jealousy, declares that Becky's "behaviour was monstrously indecorous [and] reprobated in strong terms the habit of play-acting and fancy dressing, as highly unbecoming a British female" (612). This statement applies both to Becky's part in the Charades and to

expectations for French and English women; Becky demonstrates her and her countrywomen's connections to those artificial constructions of self, both on- and off-stage, against which Haweis warns. Becky's "habit of play-acting and fancy dressing" appears both on and off the stage; it is only on the stage that it is the most recognizable. But Becky is, above all else, considered a Frenchwoman, despite her paternal Englishness. While her play-acting and fancy dressing are unbecoming a British female, they are expected with what we know of Frenchwoman Becky Sharp. In contrast, Amelia Sedley enjoys some fashionable success once more when Dobbin returns from India. The men in his company, "as usual, liked her artless kindness and simple refined demeanour" (698). While the men "as usual" appreciate Amelia's artlessness and simplicity, they are reiterating their desire for the traits England so desires for its women: the appearance of artlessness, and the presentation of naturalness. Even more so, Amelia appears as the celebrated Englishwoman because she exists "in contrast"; that is, we see who Amelia is through seeing who she decidedly is not. Her "artless kindness and simple refined demeanour" stand ever contrasted to Becky's artfulness and ostentatious demeanor.

But in the end, Amelia, too, is ever out-of-place because she never truly has "a place." Her England is taken from her by her father's financial ruin, her husband's deployment to Brussels, his philandering with other women, and her return to England as a widow. She is then a middle-class daughter without money, an Englishwoman without England, a lover without reciprocation, and a devoted wife without a husband. While Becky Sharp survives and in fact flourishes in the various circumstances in which she

finds herself because she is, above all else, adaptable to change, Amelia is not. Amelia is unable to adapt to change for the same reason she is unable to dress truly fashionably: she is unaware of her ability to construct a self. Further, Amelia needs stability and comfort. Her unfettered confidence during her honeymoon exists because George offers her the frame of reference she needs; without a way to define herself in conjunction with another, she is unable to find her place. Amelia's artificiality, writ large as naturalness, is as complete and, in truth, as genuine as Becky Sharp's. Thackeray's novel thus offers the argument that all women are "out-of-place" precisely because English social standards do not allow them a place to exist comfortably. Because fashion is believed to convey personal expression, and because that expression can be fabricated, fashion in *Vanity Fair* signals an awareness of artificiality, and whether that fashion makes a woman appear natural or artificial, it is still a tool in the construction of a self. Even Amelia's supposed naturalness is achieved through her awkward use of fashion; because she is seemingly ignorant of the expressive powers of fashion, she is presented as seemingly innocent of manipulation and artificiality.

As texts like Sarah Stickney Ellis's *The Women of England* continue to teach women the "art of conversation" in ways as to appear completely natural, these texts reiterate the desire for a veneer of artlessness rather than a destruction of artificiality overall. This veneer of "naturalness" is dependent on the final product, thereby on recognition of those trained codes of artlessness, simplicity, and naturalness. This desire for the appearance of ease and naturalness translates to the physical construction, marketing, and selling of fashion, as well, as we will see with the fictional and non-

fictional presentations of the dirty productions of fashion in the following chapter. The Victorian social and cultural world insisted that fashion be just a trivial feminine concern, and at the same time pushed its women into an impossible standard of beauty and womanhood. Within this world, women experienced a modicum of power, as evidenced by Becky Sharp's social triumph and Amelia Sedley's honeymoon success. As Chapter IV argues, the national response to this fashionable power becomes one of suspicion. In an arena that allows for choice and expression that are not always viewed as genuine, women use and manipulate fashion because it is an enjoyable avenue of power for them. Some Victorian writers present fashion as dangerous to women's morality and a woman's attention and understanding of fashion and dress to be a signal of her selfishness and vanity, all of which are detrimental to England and its established standard of womanhood. To expose this for the hypocrisy it is, writers like George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell write characters who celebrate fashion and the agency women demonstrate in their use and understanding of fashion and dress.

Notes

¹ In *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress, and Modern Social Theory*, Joanne Entwistle argues that women's morality still is judged by their clothing, and she cites sexual harassment cases as examples of morality's continuing association with women's dress and appearance (22).

² It seems Linton cannot resist a sly play on words here as she uses the auditory similarity of the "franc," the currency of France, and "franker," more sincere, to conflate Frenchwomen with monetary value.

³ In her article "'Mon Pauvre Prisonnier': Becky Sharp and the Triumph of Napoleon," Patricia Marks argues that "In the novel French disrupts the flow of the

texts, its foreignness calling attention to questions about meaning and about issues of truth and virtue. The invasive use of French is the textual equivalent of the Napoleonic campaign” (76).

⁴ Andrew Miller maintains in “Vanity Fair through Plate Glass” that Becky “represents the triumph of capitalist exchange; she expands and perfects the implicit principles of Vanity Fair. Thackeray’s term for the practice of manipulating individuals and social procedures to get something for nothing is, of course, ‘credit’: Becky lives her life—social and erotic as well as economic—on ‘nothing a year’” (1049), particularly as she spends the majority of her life avoiding her creditors. The fact that Becky is both “nothing without her finery” (Marks 82) and existing on “nothing a year” implies that Becky herself is, in fact, empty of meaning and substance.

⁵ Margot C. Finn argues that “Thackeray depicts Becky Sharpe’s [sic] sexual misconduct at once as a pragmatic strategy in her repertoire of household provisioning skills and as a fundamental threat to domestic life. Unable to command sufficient retail credit on her husband’s income alone, Becky willingly prostitutes her body to an aristocratic patron to obtain luxurious goods for her home. Local tradesmen are fully complicit in her open secret of her deception” precisely because of the Marquis of Steyne’s patronage (49).

⁶ In fact, the Sedleys’ groom, upon delivering Becky to the Crawleys, refuses to help her carry her things out of the carriage because Becky received Amelia’s castoffs that were to go to the lady’s-maid originally. His argument seems to be centered on two details: the lady’s-maid’s true need for clothing, and the fact that Becky is “a bad lot” (104). Here, Becky’s complicated social position is presented in that she is neither guest nor servant, so neither middle-class nor working-class. Her ambiguous class position seems to owe its ambiguity to her French blood.

⁷ Also interesting here is the implication that Becky thwarts other servants from dressing better. The gowns she accepts from Amelia that cause such a stir with the Sedleys’ groom also cause a stir in the Sedleys’ below-stairs, as well. In a letter to Amelia, Becky recalls the “*dear* muslin gown” Amelia gave her “about which that odious Mrs. Pinner was so rude, because you gave it me” (112). Becky implies that the Sedleys’ servants find Becky an interloper because she takes items that would traditionally go to them.

⁸ One example that contradicts this theory would be Becky’s presentation at court, for which she robs the Crawley’s ancestral wardrobes, picking through old dresses to secure quality brocade and lace (558). Here, older clothes offer Becky respectability and authenticity because they offer her the illusion of an English pedigree.

⁹ In “Siren and Artist: Contradiction in Thackeray’s Aesthetic Ideal,” Judith Law Fisher reads this scene as demonstrating “Becky’s mechanical skill at arranging her portrait [...] emphasized by the theatrical lighting and careful composition of the scene” (399). Fisher contrasts what she calls “Becky’s manufactured brilliance” (399) with Amelia’s “sincerity” (400).

¹⁰ For further discussion on Indian shawls in Gaskell’s *North and South*, see Chapter II.

¹¹ The other women in the novel who possess Becky’s power of reading and interpreting fashion are, surprisingly, the Misses Osborne, George’s sisters. They often shred Amelia’s confidence with their “bold black eyes” because they read through her outward appearances and find them wanting. Or, as the narrator reminds us, “the Misses Osborne were excellent critics of a Cashmere shawl, or a pink satin slip; and when Miss Turner had hers dyed purple, and made into a spencer; and when Miss Pickford had her ermine tippet twisted into a muff and trimmings, I warrant you the changes did not escape the two intelligent young women before mentioned” (150). The social power they have, while not vast like Becky’s, is, like Becky’s, dependent on their fashionable vision.

¹² An interesting contrast to Becky’s ability to read through fashionable artifices is Amelia’s ability to read through artifices of love. It is Amelia who sees through the façade Becky and Rawdon have created in their secret marriage, and when Amelia tells Becky, “I see it all,” it is because “her woman’s eyes, which Love had made sharp-sighted, had in one instant discovered a secret which was invisible to Miss Crawley, to poor virgin Briggs, and above all, to the stupid peepers of that young whiskered prig, Lieutenant Osborne” (183). Becky appears overwhelmed by Amelia’s ability to read correctly the situation because she does not expect Amelia to see through disguise and artifice. At this moment, Becky kisses Amelia in a seemingly genuine emotional response rarely seen from Becky Sharp (183).

¹³ A further example of Becky’s “out-of-placeness” while in England appears in a letter Miss Pinkerton writes to Mrs. Bute Crawley. In it, Miss Pinkerton confesses that while she “cannot regret that I received [Becky] *out of charity*,” she worries that the “principles of the mother—who was represented to me as a French Countess, forced to emigrate in the late revolutionary horrors; but who, as I have since found, was a person of the *very lowest order and morals*—should at any time prove to be *hereditary* in the unhappy young woman whom I took as an *outcast*” (135, emphasis original). While Miss Pinkerton’s anger is directed more at the deception played upon herself than out of any notion of the preservation of English ideals, she emphasizes the foreignness of Becky not only through her nationality, but also through her station. As an “outcast” taken in “out of charity,” Becky represents the dangers of extending such charity outside of good English homes.

¹⁴ In their article “The ‘Waterloo Ball’ Dresses at the Museum of Costume, Bath,” Penelope Byrde and Ann Saunders remind us that “The Battle of Waterloo took place on 18 June 1815 between Napoleon’s army and the British and Prussian forces. On the evening of 15 June, the Duchess of Richmond gave a ball at her residence in the Rue de la Blanchisserie in Brussels; it was interrupted by news of Napoleon’s advance and on the following day there was bloody action at Quatrebras, which preceded the main battle” (65). This article also focuses on “the ladies and the baggage” as it discusses “the ‘Waterloo Ball’ dresses at the Museum of Costume [...]. The dresses are almost identical and belonged to two sisters who, according to the donor, had attended the ball as their brother was an aide-de-camp to the Duke of Wellington” (64). Byrde and Saunders conclude that the provenance of the dresses is indeterminable with regard to their proximity to such a historical occasion.

¹⁵ For further discussion, see Lambert’s “The Dandy in Thackeray’s ‘Vanity Fair’ and ‘Pendennis’: An Early Victorian View of the Regency Dandy,” Lindner’s “Thackeray’s Gourmand: Carnivals of Consumption in *Vanity Fair*,” and Litvak’s chapter “Kiss Me, Stupid: Sophistication and Snobbery in *Vanity Fair*,” from his book *Strange Gourmets*. It is interesting to note that in most criticism on *Vanity Fair*, a discussion of Jos inevitably comes back to his size, fashion, and appetite. Even in Sandy Norton’s “The Ex-Collector of Boggley-Wollah: Colonialism in the Empire of *Vanity Fair*,” which discusses Victorian Empire and domesticity, pauses to reflect on Jos’s vidual appetite, which she compares to “the consumption and the commodities he represents” in the novel (126).

¹⁶ What is extremely interesting about Craik’s article is the reminder that “The military uniform emerged in seventeenth-century France, initially as a means to readily identify opposing sides in battle” (131). Even the English military uniform, perhaps one of the most recognizable symbols of nationalism for Englishmen and women, originates, in theory, from France.

¹⁷ Much of this theory of the disciplining powers of the uniform comes from Michel Foucault’s study *Discipline and Punish*. Critics like Jennifer Craik argue that the uniform’s discipline of the body comes not only from the “Enforcement of uniform practice” but also from “the experience of uniforms” (128), in which what the uniform represents is written, literally, on the body of the soldier. He walks and holds himself in a certain way because of the uniform. Women and their fashion, in contrast, are not as literally scripted as this; at least, to argue such would be to discount the powerful representation of fashion to women and about women.

¹⁸ In *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, the Bennet girls meet Mr. Wickham, already in possession of a “most gentlemanlike appearance,” whose acceptance of a commission in the military was “exactly as it should be; for the young man wanted only

regimentals to make him completely charming” (106). His good looks, described as “the best part of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure,” would be, according to the narrator, best set off by a military uniform (106).

¹⁹ Mrs. Sedley declares George a “dandy [...] With his military airs, indeed!” (214). His attention to dress and clothing and his position in the military seem to be one and the same.

²⁰ Tim Fulford notes that “In the British countryside of the late eighteenth century the most striking new thing was an officer’s coat. The military was in residence for the first time, and its dress was anything but uniform. The red, blue, and green coats shone in a dazzling variety, identifying the wearers not as individuals but as members of different regiments” (154). In a footnote to this statement, he acknowledges that the more archaic term “regimentals” means “military dress,” while “uniform” conveys that very meaning: “new coats [that] made the soldiers appear identical” (154).

²¹ Jennifer Craik asks similar questions in her article: “Why do certain canonical elements of uniforms—such as brass buttons, braid, frogging, epaulettes, tailored clothing (jackets, coats, pants), headwear, exaggerated collars—so insistently recur in fashion and contemporary culture?” (127). She argues that the image these elements set forth, particularly through lighting and color, “evok[e] the spectacle of the uniformed body. Uniformed and non-uniformed bodies constantly proclaim a uniformed self” (127-28). For Craik, then, even the smallest parts of the uniform recall the uniformed body and what it represents.

²² Even Becky’s good housewifery is artificial, albeit successful. The narrator tells us that “a good housewife is of necessity a humbug” (211). In this sense, then, Becky performs an acceptable role.

²³ For further discussion of the blush in nineteenth-century literature, see Mary Ann O’Farrell’s *Telling Complexions: The Nineteenth-Century English Novel and the Blush*.

²⁴ Beginning in the late eighteenth century, and increasingly following the Napoleonic Wars, the world saw an increase in travel among middle-class women (Langford 25), as women began to conduct Continental Tours of their own. In his book *Englishness Identified: Manners and Character, 1650-1850*, Paul Langford discusses the pervasiveness of an English national character and, more specifically, the need to recreate England in a foreign setting. Langford directly connects this recreation of English mores and manners to an “increasing presence of wives, daughters and mothers among these invaders” to France and the Low Countries following the Napoleonic Wars (25). Langford sees the fashionable tourist as an “invader,” one who is “more concerned with the quality of a replica English breakfast than the scenic views,” and the inclusion

of women in such an invasion to have “brought new problems, including the whole paraphernalia of English social life” (25). Part of this “paraphernalia of English social life” is, of course, fashion, and the problems dress provides for Englishwomen abroad is the difference it marks on the bodies of Englishwomen. Immediately recognizable, these women cannot align themselves, fashionably, with their French, German, or Italian sisters. Given the English habit for recreating England in foreign lands, it would serve that these women do not want to.

²⁵ Traveling abroad, whether for pleasure, for familial obligation, or for protection, requires that Englishwomen immerse themselves in another nation’s culture, learn its language, and interact with its people, while never losing their own ties to home.

²⁶ This phenomenon, dressing up for traveling abroad, is not isolated to nineteenth-century Englishwomen, but the discourse surrounding such distinct modes of national dress reaches its pinnacle as travel becomes easier, safer, and more accepted for middle-class Englishwomen. In short, the discourse is so bountiful because tourism began to thrive in the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER IV

“THE WILL AND PLEASURE OF WOMEN”: THE FEMININE LOVE OF FASHION AND ENGLAND’S RESPONSE

In her 1859 article “Female Industry,” Harriet Martineau equates the rise of the middle class with the rise of first a male then a female workforce (10) and emphasizes the importance of women in England’s industries because of the sheer amount of work they accomplish. Martineau reminds her audience that “a very large proportion of the women of England earn their own bread” (9) and thus calls immediate attention not only to the necessity of women to the nation’s workforce, but also to the independence of those women; by stating that the “women of England earn their own bread,” Martineau understands that not all women depend on male relatives for matters of money and work, nor suggests that they should. In her estimation, women are capable of being financially and personally independent. Martineau notes that the majority of this female workforce earns its financial and personal independence “by one of two methods,—by the needle or by becoming educators” (41), and those who earn their living “by the needle” work in numerous aspects of the fashion industry, including dressmaking, seamstressing, textile manufacturing, and lace making. She argues that the “industrial independence of women” (40) provides a large portion of the workforce needed to manufacture textiles like wool, silk, lace, and cotton, to make objects of art out of metal or clay, and to produce and maintain articles of fashion and dress (32-33). By Martineau’s accounting, this number is just under one million workers. Not only are these women needed because of the sheer numbers they represent in the larger scale of England’s workforce,

but also because of the talent they exhibit in fashion work. Martineau understands this proliferation of female fashion workers as a national commodity and argues that a marriage of these two popular careers, needlework and education, would benefit the nation overall.

In Martineau's estimation, the manufacture of decorative and fashionable items is a rich legacy in England, and England's female workforce is overwhelmingly responsible for that legacy. Martineau argues for her readers to "look to cultivated women also for the improvement of our national character as tasteful manufacturers" (45). She sees the improvement of "our," that is, England's "national character" as both the improvement of England's reputation in the world and the improvement of England's defining attribute, its people. This improvement of the "national character" of England will come through its development of its manufacturing, and particularly, through manufacturing led by "cultivated women." These "cultivated women" can develop England's "tasteful manufacture" because "It is only the inferiority of our designs which prevents our taking the lead of the world in our silks, ribbons, artificial flowers, paper-hangings, carpets and furniture generally" (45). Martineau explores a large portion of necessary work in England performed by women not as a detriment to the nation but rather as a way to benefit and even raise the nation in international esteem. Work typically identified as "women's work" and denigrated thus is rather an opportunity for the nation at large to better itself insofar as it supports, maintains, and develops its female workforce. Most importantly, Martineau argues that working women in general, and women working in the fashionable and artistic trades,

specifically, will improve England's "national character" and thus allow the nation to "tak[e] the lead of the world." Martineau places the power to change not only commercial England but the very essence of the nation, and its esteem in the eyes of its international peers, firmly in the hands of its women. This positive change for England will be wrought by the actions of its women through their skills with trade, manufacture, and design and not by their symbolic representation of nation.¹ Most importantly, this improvement will be the direct result of England's development in the seemingly incidental accessories of fashion, like silks, ribbons, and artificial flowers.

Martineau's article is just one of a proliferation of texts discussing England's female workforce during the 1840s, 1850s, and 1860s,² all of which are direct responses to the economic crisis plaguing England at this time. Because of familial economic distress, many unmarried, middle-class women could not rely on the financial support of their families until they were married, nor could they rely on a suitable dowry with which to attract a viable candidate for marriage, two heretofore traditionally accepted means of financial support for women. Instead, these women entered England's workforce through governessing, teaching, or even trade, like *Cranford*'s Miss Matty. For working-class women, the opportunities were considerably fewer, and Mary Poovey tells us that "by the 1840s and 1850s, dressmaking, millinery, and teaching far outstripped all other occupational activities" (127). The sheer numbers of women unable to find the employment they needed became a national problem for England,³ and while some writers promoted emigration to and marriage in the British colonies for these "redundant women,"⁴ others preferred to examine the problem at home and determine

the solution that would be, for England, a satisfactory one.⁵ Martineau's belief that the strength of England comes not only from its female workforce but the female workforce designated for the decorative arts and, specifically, the fashion industry is a positive view of an industry that oftentimes in Victorian texts is writ large as dangerous physically and morally for England's women.

Most nineteenth-century English writers saw women's work in the creation and maintenance of fashion to be detrimental to women's health, women's morality, and ultimately, women's characters. As more women entered the fashion industry, the abuse of desperate poverty-stricken women became national news, and many writers took up the cause of the fashion worker suffering starvation, poverty, debilitating disease, and ultimately death. Some writers agree with Martineau's view that the detrimental effects on women's health the fashion industry seems to perpetuate are made wearisome by the "incessant repetition of the dreary story of [...] starving needlewomen" (9), and while the number of Victorian and modern discussions of the fashion worker's plight supports the accusation of "incessant repetition," it was, in truth, an important concern for England.⁶ The fashion industry's intimate connection with the female body instigates many of the discussions surrounding the morality and vanity of Englishwomen who exist within the fashion industry, either as workers or as purchasers. The fashion trade in nineteenth-century England is marked by the close association of those working-class or lower-middle-class women who manufacture, produce, or maintain fashion with the middle-class women who are their customers or their employers.

Much of the writing centered upon the plight of the fashion worker expresses anger against women's vanity and sees it as the specific cause for the poor health, desperation, and at its most extreme, death of the fashion worker in nineteenth-century England. Many nineteenth-century women writers took up the needleworker's or dressmaker's cause as their own. Anna Brownell Jameson's 1843 report "Milliners" responds to a national study about women's work and focuses specifically on the findings regarding the lives and hardships of London's fashion workers. She offers evidence from a Dr. James Johnson who states,

The fashionable world know not how many thousand females are annually sacrificed, during each season, in this metropolis, by the sudden demand and forced supply of modish ornaments and ephemeral habiliments. They know not that, while they conscientiously believe they are patronizing and rewarding industry, they are actually depriving many thousand young women of sleep, air, and exercise. (qtd. in Jameson 5)

Dr. Johnson sees ignorance as a definitive symptom of vanity and extravagance, and urges the "fashionable world" to become aware of the dangers wrought on a working class by the demand for "modish ornaments and ephemeral habiliments." Jameson uses this quote to highlight the fact that "15,000 of the inhabitants of London" (5) are such fashion workers in order to force her readers to appreciate the magnitude of the sheer number of women suffering for other's clothing. Jameson concludes her discussion of milliners with a judgment on her belief that "Of all the vanities of life, that of dress is at once the most inane and mindless, and its gratification the least defensible, if purchased

at the cost of pain to any human being” (6). Calling attention to the fact that dress is a vanity that is, to Jameson, “the most inane and mindless,” understands concern with dress as “inane and mindless” thought; Jameson judges women for their concern over their appearance at the sacrifice of concern over human life.⁷

As an adoration of fashion becomes for a nineteenth-century audience an excessive love of finery, and thus an excessive love of the artificial construction of female bodies, a love of fashion signals a woman’s excessive vanity. The continuous Victorian belief in the evils of female vanity judges not only the middle-class women who purchase fashion, but also the working-class women who create and maintain the clothing for their middle-class purchasers. Fashion’s stereotypical connection to extravagance, women’s vanity, and women’s work is at its core a reminder of women and money, and for nineteenth-century England, women buying and selling fashion equates to women buying and selling their bodies.⁸ As Jameson argues, fashion is synonymous with female vanity, but it is also synonymous with the actual bodies of the dressmakers producing the fashions. Those bodies are deprived of “sleep, air, and exercise” because of their work in the fashion industry, and thus are literally connected to the buying and selling of female bodies. Jameson also considers the literal accoutrements of fashion, the “costliest trappings” like “plumes” and “diamonds,” as directly responsible for “the mass of suffering from which that splendour sprung” (6). She directly equates the bodies of milliners with the extravagance of fashion, and thus literally exchanges the damaged body of the milliner for fashion:

If the bloodless cheeks and attenuated frames of these poor milliner girls passed in array before the beauty their lives are sacrificed to adorn, it might, perhaps, induce them to abate a little of the brilliance of our ball-rooms, for the preservation of the souls and bodies of fifteen thousand of our fellow beings. (6)

By presenting the “bloodless cheeks and attenuated frames of these poor milliner girls” to her readers, Jameson literally exchanges the sacrifice of the bodies of “these poor milliner girls” for the adornment of beauty, an exchange of one woman’s body for another woman’s vanity. As the connection between women and work becomes a connection between women and money, the connection between women and fashion becomes a connection between women and the selling and purchasing of clothed bodies or, in the case of the poor milliner, the selling and purchasing of women’s bodies for clothing. The next step in this traffic in women can be seen in the extreme example of the buying and selling of women’s bodies: prostitution.⁹

Throughout the nineteenth century, the believed connection between women’s fashion and women’s morality is nowhere better seen than in the Victorian examination of and fascination with the fallen woman and her most extreme example, the prostitute. A prostitute’s livelihood often was intertwined with her outward appearance; the more beautiful and more fashionable she was, the more money she could charge for her services, and the more respectable clientele she could expect.¹⁰ The intimate association fashion has with a woman’s body may seem self-explanatory, as clothing is worn next to naked skin, and is the only protection against public exposure, but this association

becomes problematic as clothing and morality are tangled together. Joanne Entwistle argues that “dress is both an intimate experience of the body and a public presentation of it” (7). This dichotomy, the constant public exposure of the need to cover the private body, is entangled with the nineteenth-century fashionable discourse that seeks to identify women’s morality through their clothing.

Larger national concerns like the Woman Question, female emigration, women’s work, the Contagious Diseases Acts, and the burgeoning reform movements that gain momentum and support in the latter half of the nineteenth century all are concerned with the very question of a woman’s control over her own body. As these two texts from Harriet Martineau and Anna Jameson show, nineteenth-century England is also deeply concerned with how the construction and appreciation of fashion and dress contribute to a woman’s control over her own body. Women writers like Martineau and Jameson respond to these Victorian concerns about women’s rights over their own bodies, their own lives, and their access to and movement in the public sphere by viewing these concerns specifically through the so-called “feminine concerns” of fashion and dress. While Jameson seemingly differs from Martineau in her accounting of the detriments of the fashion industry for its workers, she in fact wants the same outcome as Martineau: greater appreciation for the sheer amount of work women do in and for England. For Jameson, recognizing the dangers of the fashion industry will make England more aware of the plight of its fashion workers because they are, as Jameson reminds, “our fellow beings” (6). By stating that these women, too, are English, Jameson, like Martineau, encourages direct attention to what these women do for the country at large. Martineau

calls for greater training and education and thus better treatment of these women because their attentions to fashion can benefit the nation tremendously, and they should be treated accordingly.

Jameson and Martineau represent two of the more common opinions the Victorian era held about fashion and dress and their effects on women's character, and the nation's. While some writers like Jameson see love of fashion as a potential detriment not only to women but also to England's women, "our fellow beings," writers like Martineau see it as a potential benefit to the nation, a chance to improve the national character. Throughout the nineteenth century, fashion, dress, and in particular, a woman's appreciation of both are inextricably connected with personal and national character in the century's non-fiction and its literature. In this chapter, I argue that novelists Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot respond to England's concerns regarding the connection between women's fashion and their morality by presenting either sympathetic or ambivalent portraits of their female characters and their love of fashion. In particular, both writers' own love of fashion and the details of dress is reiterated throughout their novels through the compassionate understanding of women working in the fashion industry or through their commiseration with their female characters and the power that their skill with and taste for dress offers them.

Gaskell's 1848 novel *Mary Barton* offers two presentations of women's love of finery. The title character Mary Barton is in constant danger of seduction because of the freedom allotted to her through her job at the local dressmaker's shop, while Aunt Esther's affinity for pretty clothes and accessories leads directly to her sexual downfall,

despite the warnings of her family. And the vanity of each woman directly contributes to her potential for fallenness; Mary Barton chooses to work at a dressmaker's shop in order to be surrounded by pretty things, while Esther's extravagant love of fashion forces her to take drastic measures to support her desires financially. Both Esther and Mary "fall" not only because of their vanity and desire for pretty things, but also because they reject the regional and thus working-class life offered to them by the industrial Northern England town, Manchester. Like almost all Victorian novels that present the fallen woman, Gaskell's novel presents a social rejection of both Esther and Mary at the end, in accordance with the expectations for fallen women. Esther dies as a result of the tragic circumstances of her life, and Mary, while redeemed in the eyes of her family, friends, and neighbors, must leave England and immigrate to Canada with her husband. Neither woman can remain within a nation that claims to be dependent on the selflessness and purity of its women for continued success, nor can they remain in a nation that is dependent on the manufacture they so decidedly reject. But both women are presented as characters who deserve the reader's sympathy, not the reader's disdain. Gaskell's own love of fashion, expressed throughout her novels in the intricate details of dress she offers her readers, is in this novel passed on to her two female characters and her sympathetic portrayal of them both.

George Eliot's 1871-72 novel *Middlemarch* does not cast judgment on its female characters for their seemingly excessive love of finery. Rather, its utter admiration of Dorothea Brooke, a character traditionally defined by her selflessness, and its more ambivalent portrayal of Rosamond Vincy, a character traditionally defined by her

selfishness, offer two sketches of women's responses to and love of dress. Dorothea, seemingly unfashionable and contrary, is in fact very stylish and has complete control and awareness of the most flattering clothing for her body and coloring. Rosamond, on the other hand, appears to be shallow, superficial, and vain but instead Eliot's portrayal of her is bittersweet and ambivalent of the social expectations of fashionable womanhood. Her love of clothing does not cause her unhappiness in the end. Rather, the novel's complicated conclusion of Rosamond as the wife of a wealthy, doting, and aging husband offers Rosamond exactly what she wanted throughout the novel: wealth and materiality. While Eliot's novel by no means establishes Rosamond as an equal counterpart to the pure-intentioned and complex Dorothea Brooke, the novel's constant attentions to both women's fashionability or antifashionability, and, most interestingly, both women's love of finery, offer an alternative to the traditional narrative that insists a woman's love of fashion is a socially expected but still socially abhorred trait. Further, *Middlemarch* argues that fashion and dress are arenas through which women gain access to and occupy a place of feminine power, and through which women achieve agency and control over their own bodies without damaging the national character of England.

“Those Painted, Dressy Women”¹¹: Fallenness and the Fashion Worker's Plight

In his controversial 1857 study *Prostitution*, William Acton reports and analyzes the data he has culled from his study of the professional sex workers of London. In the 1869 “Preface” to the second edition of his text, Acton calls for England to recognize and reform the prostitute, and thereby end the sex trade in London. While his text is

somewhat sympathetic to the plight of London's sex workers, his language is overwhelmingly patronizing and, most interestingly, nationalistic. He sees prostitution as "The nation's weakness" that "can be assisted only by the nation's strength" (24), and suggests that acknowledging the existence of prostitutes is the first step toward the reformation of the English sex trade.¹² This "recognition" of the large-scale social problem is a rhetorical one for Acton; he argues that society men and women alike already know these "fair creatures, neither chaperons nor chaperoned, 'those somebodies whom nobody knows'" (24) as sex workers, despite the fact that they refuse to admit the existence of the prostitute class. Acton details the outward signals that identify prostitutes and distinguish them from "our wives and daughters in the parks and promenades and rendezvous of fashion" (24). The signals he records are overwhelmingly material. The prostitutes are "painted, dressy women" who "boldly [accost] the passers-by" despite the fact that they are "ill-clothed and uncared for" (24). Acton also divides the prostitutes working in London by their clothing; he categorizes the prostitutes as "Well dressed, living in brothels," as "Well dressed, walking the streets," or as "Low, infesting low neighbourhoods" (33). These categories not only strip any individuality from the women but also offer neatly packaged, easily identifiable figures for the middle-class readers of his text. So, too, does his language help along the images he wishes to portray of these women. A prostitute identifiable through "Low" clothing is neither "living" nor "walking" but rather "infesting" neighborhoods also identifiable as "low." She is no longer a woman but rather a contagion that can "infest" parts of London. Her well-dressed counterparts, however, are perhaps even more

dangerous in that their clothing could be indistinguishable from their middle-class counterparts. But in Acton's estimation, "Well dressed" implies not elegant clothing but rather elaborate finery notable for its excess; those "painted, dressy women" wear clothing that apes the more refined clothing of the women of the upper classes. Fashion is for Acton and his readers socially constructed as a connection between women's morality and sexuality, and according to Acton's categories, fashion is inextricably connected to these women's fallenness.

The public perception of prostitution's well-dressed workers is echoed in the prose and the poetry of the Victorian era; an elaborate display of finery more often than not signals a fallen woman. Thomas Hardy's poem "The Ruined Maid" (1866) presents 'Melia, a former country girl who meets an old acquaintance in Town who expresses shock over her "fair garments" (3) since 'Melia "left [them] in tatters, without shoes or socks" (5) "And now [she has] gay bracelets and bright feathers three!" (7).¹³ 'Melia's response to these inquiries over her new garment is simply, "that's how we dress when we're ruined" (8). Her "feathers" and her "fine sweeping gown" (21) astonish the "raw country girl" (23) who admires 'Melia's new successes, but while 'Melia pretends to have made the best of her situation, her final statement, "You ain't ruined" (24), belies the "talking quite [fit] for high compa-ny" (11) the young woman so admired earlier in the poem.¹⁴ 'Melia may have beautiful clothes and the freedom to "strut about Town" (22) now, but that very freedom and her beautiful clothes mark her as fallen to a society that identifies women by their outward presentations of self. Further, that freedom insists on the danger 'Melia poses to the seemingly more respectable middle class. A

woman with the purpose and opportunity to traverse the city, to “strut about Town” as ‘Melia does, poses a threat to a society that prides itself on its insularity and its distinguishable spheres. ‘Melia’s ability to move about the city streets defies Victorian ideology that would relegate women to the home. ‘Melia, as a working-class woman, has more freedom of movement than her middle-class counterparts, but by presenting that freedom as a benefit rather than a detriment to her rural friend, she belies the commonly-held beliefs regarding the necessity of protection and insulation of Victorian women.

For many Victorian writers, a woman’s mere attention to fashion suggests her lack of purity; Eliza Lynn Linton, often opinionated regarding dress and, particularly, fashionable dress, links high fashion with prostitution. Linton argues for the destruction of middle-class society and ideals because of the close attention middle-class women pay to the beautiful dress of high fashion courtesans. These well-dressed women, existing on the outskirts of society but in the inner circle of fashionable discourse, contradict the commonly-held Victorian belief that prostitutes and courtesans, and also many working-class women, look to the middle and upper classes for their fashionable inspirations. In “The Girl of the Period,” Linton argues that “What the *demi-monde* does in its frantic efforts to excite attention, [the girl of the period] also does in imitation” (357). While Linton sees a connection between the attention paid to high-fashion courtesans and a woman’s declining morality, she also sees the decline of a society overtly interested in the comings and goings of the *demi-monde*. In Linton’s estimation, attention leads to imitation, and imitation “leads to something in manner and

feeling” (358). For Linton, fashion is inextricably connected with a woman’s morality, and the more attention a woman pays to those highly fashionable courtesans and their clothes, the more she will imitate them in all things. Linton believes that a modern Victorian woman craves the “luxury which is brought by vice” that the courtesan has even though the modern English girl claims that “she is not yet prepared to pay quite the same price” (358). But in Linton’s estimation, the girl of the period “has already paid too much—all that once gave her distinctive national character” (358). Linton’s deliberate use of the phrase “national character” implies both the “national character” of Englishwomen, defined as frank, trustworthy, brave, refined, domestic, and graceful (356), and the “character” of Englishwomen, their reputations. Their reputations have declined in Linton’s assessment and, as she argues, England’s: “No one can say of the modern English girl that she is tender, loving, retiring, or domestic” (358). The modern girl of the period has lost all that defines the “ideal of womanhood” (356) detailed by Linton at the beginning of her essay. Ultimately, Linton’s text expresses an underlying fear of a woman’s capacity to choose; if a middle-class woman chooses to follow the demi-monde and its fashions, then that woman has the agency to do so. A woman thus has the ability to make her own fashionable choices, and has control over the presentation of her own body. A woman’s growing freedom of movement and freedom of choice in the nineteenth century, then, both highlighted through fashionable discourse, represent the growing anxieties of the Victorian middle class about women’s control over their own bodies, the presentation of those bodies, and the ability of those bodies to move within heretofore socially unacceptable places.

The tracts that call for an end to prostitution inevitably employ a call to home and nation that asks the reader to consider the detriment of the nation because of this great social evil. While W. R. Greg's 1850 study "Prostitution" for the *Westminster Review* carefully differentiates between "one of the sorest evils," prostitution, and the prostitute herself, it still considers prostitution to be a "hideous gangrene of English society" (252) even at the same time it asks that "every heart should bleed for the position of an English prostitute, as it never bled at any form of woe before" (240). The language is very specific here; while both Greg and Acton discuss the reforms put forth to help prostitutes in France, their concern is specifically for English prostitutes, and thus their concerns are the concerns of their nation. Greg's belief that prostitution is a "hideous gangrene" reflects Acton's argument that some prostitutes "infest" certain neighborhoods of London; in both men's estimation, prostitution is an infection on the national body. Kathryn Norberg notices this type of nationalist rhetoric in her examination of prostitutes in the early part of the nineteenth century and reminds us that "Nineteenth-century moralists blamed 'prostitutes' for everything from the fall of nations to the demise of the family" (35), a sentiment carried well into the nineteenth century. Writers like Greg and Acton attempt to separate prostitution from prostitutes themselves, yet both return, again and again, to the role of dress in the downfall of the at-risk woman. Greg acknowledges that poverty is possibly the main cause for leading women to prostitution rather than "idleness, extravagance, and love of dress" (245), but still suggests that these vanities exist both before and after the fall for the women he studies. In order to best express the plight of the prostitute, Greg quotes extensively from

personal narratives and from works of fiction, most notably Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*.

As mentioned in my discussion of *Cranford*, Elizabeth Gaskell's novels offer various presentations, almost all sympathetic, of fashionable women, and each of her major novels examines the intimate connection of women and fashion. *Cranford* presents the construction of nationhood through women's fashion, while her 1853 novel *Ruth* shows the dangers a young woman alone faces when seduced by the bright fashionable world. *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863) employs frequent scenes of shopping and clothing selection, while *Wives and Daughters*, her unfinished final novel published between 1864-66, often compares the two young women, Molly Gibson and Cynthia Kirkpatrick, through their approaches to fashion. In short, Elizabeth Gaskell adores fashion and dress, and presents it in her novels as an important part of women's lives. Sometimes dangerous, sometimes beneficial, fashion and dress are for Gaskell inextricable from women's lives. In her 1848 novel *Mary Barton*, Gaskell explores both traditional aspects of women's fashion and morality: Mary Barton's close proximity to fashion through her work in the fashion industry and Aunt Esther's seemingly excessive love of finery.

Mary Barton begins with a picturesque scene set against the backdrop of industrial Manchester, the image of robust factory girls enjoying the impromptu holiday. These girls are described as between the ages of "twelve to twenty," and they walk with a "buoyant step" (6). The text identifies them as factory girls because they

wore the usual out-of-doors dress of that particular class of maidens; namely, a shawl, which at mid-day or in fine weather was allowed to be merely a shawl, but toward evening, or if the day were chilly, became a sort of Spanish mantilla or Scotch plaid, and was brought over the head and hung loosely down, or was pinned under the chin in no unpicturesque fashion. (6)

Gaskell identifies the girls as factory workers through their dress, here specifically figured as their shawls. These are not the Indian shawls Gaskell details in *Cranford* and *North and South* but a shawl of domestic manufacture common to the northern region of England.¹⁵ The connection between the shawl and the female factory worker is instantly recognizable to a Victorian reading audience; the shawl is part of the traditional dress of the factory girl in mid-nineteenth-century industrial England.¹⁶ This particular scene of factory girls in Manchester would establish the shawl and thus the factory girls as both working-class and English, two important and revered identifiers in Gaskell's text. Further, their work in a factory in Manchester is most likely in the cotton industry, as "Cotton manufacture and trade pervades and structures the representation of Manchester life in the 1840s" (Guest 88). This connection to regionalism and manufacturing calls forth a national pride very much like the one Martineau asserts for the female workforce of England. While the girls are not necessarily beautiful, they do present "an acuteness and intelligence of countenance" which is for Gaskell's text quite common "in a manufacturing population" (6). The beauty that the girls display is not only in the "acuteness and intelligence" of their expressions, but also, and most importantly, in the

way they wear their shawls. The shawls often are worn traditionally, hanging around the shoulders and arms, but in cooler weather the shawl is transformed from traditionally working-class English to more fashionable presentations. This fashionable shift shows that unlike Esther, these female factory workers—and thus working-class women—were not always swayed by fashionable garments, particularly those garments not subsumed into the nation or the empire. While the origin of the shawl is always and firmly ensconced in the nation, the wearing of the English shawl in a foreign mode adds charm to the garment. The language of the passage is very particular; the shawl is always the traditional shawl, but “became a sort of Spanish mantilla or Scotch plaid” when worn over the head or under the chin. The addition of “Scotch plaid” keeps the shawl rooted firmly in the British Empire, and shows that despite their fashionable touches, their factory girls are solidly British.

The robust health and charm of the factory girls contrast sharply with the Barton family and their acquaintances, the Wilsons; the pre-Reform Manchester presented in *Mary Barton* may allow triumph, excellence, and most importantly, health for the factory girl, but it causes particular strife to the working-class man.¹⁷ John Barton is firmly English, in that he is “a thorough specimen of a Manchester man; born of factory workers, and himself bred up in youth, and living in manhood, among the mills” (7). Like the factory girls, he is tied completely to the industrial town in which he was born and raised. Unlike the factory girls, he cannot claim the same robustness. John has “almost a stunted look about him; and his wan, colourless face, gave you the idea, that in his childhood he had suffered from the scanty living consequent upon bad times, and

improvident habits” (7). John’s wife, too, suffers much for her life, as she “might have been called a lovely woman” except for her face which is “swollen with crying, and often hidden behind her apron” (7).¹⁸ Her beauty is, like the factory girls, described regionally: “She had the fresh beauty of the agricultural districts; and somewhat of the deficiency of sense in her countenance, which is likewise characteristic of the rural inhabitants in comparison with the natives of the manufacturing towns” (7). While Gaskell sets apart the agricultural districts as producing beautiful women, they are not known for producing intelligent ones; that honor remains in Gaskell’s novel for Manchester and other manufacturing towns. For *Mary Barton*, a woman’s association with manufacturing, the creation of textiles and even, in the case of Mary Barton, dressmaking, is a direct correlation with her intelligence. Gaskell, like Martineau after her, sees work in a factory or mill to be a suitable profession for a woman because it benefits that nation and its reputation in manufacturing.¹⁹

The Bartons’ and the Wilsons’ conversation centers on the recent disappearance of the elder Mary Barton’s sister, Esther, who is a factory girl herself, albeit a former one. Mary fears Esther has drowned herself despite John’s argument that suicide is unlikely because “folks don’t care to put on their best clothes to drown themselves” (8), as those clothes could be given to family members, sold secondhand, or even be worn for the funeral. The last time Esther was seen, she was “dressed in her Sunday gown, and with a new ribbon in her bonnet, and gloves on her hands, like the lady she was so fond of thinking herself” (8). Esther is guilty of two sins: of forsaking her family and of aping her betters, both of which John sees as the result of the free lifestyle and lucrative

pay factory work affords women. He argues that factory girls in Manchester “can earn so much when work is plenty, that they can maintain themselves any how” (9), and the freedom that their money affords them releases their dependency on family and, specifically, male relations, to support them. He recalls telling Esther that her vanity, fueled by her ability to buy fashionable clothes to “set off her pretty face,” will eventually lead to sexual proclivity and danger (9). In John’s estimation, Esther’s “artificial, and [her] fly-away veils” are directly connected to her “stopping out when honest women are in their beds” and her eventual turn to streetwalking (9).

But despite John’s belief that Esther’s fall is directly correlated with her work in the factory, his earlier statements about Esther’s beauty belie this connection. He notes that his wife and sister are “Buckinghamshire people as comes to work here” and they have “quite a different look with them to us Manchester folk” (9). Because Esther is an outsider, not born to the industrial life in Manchester and instead come “to work here,” she is in the book’s estimation not born to the life she has acquired. She is too delicate for factory work, and unused to the financial freedom and physical independence the factory work offers her. Even her looks, which for John are incongruous with the working women of Manchester, damn Esther to fallenness before she leaves the factory; her beauty seems to predict her eventual fall because it reveals her vanity. John tells his friends that

You’ll not see among the Manchester wenches such fresh rosy cheeks, or such black lashes to grey eyes (making them look like black), as my wife and Esther had. I never seed [sic] two such pretty women for sisters;

never. Not but what beauty is a sad snare. Here was Esther so puffed up, that there was no holding her in. (9)

John Barton is a Manchester man, and Manchester is all he knows. Rather than nationalist pride, his pride comes in the form of regionalism for a specific place within the country; his love of his region within the country sees Manchester as microcosmic of a larger England. Barton sees in Esther's outsider status as a native of Buckinghamshire the reason she could not maintain the secure and protected position within the Barton family home. Her beauty becomes foreign in this determination as John is specific in his determination of "Us" versus "Them."²⁰ Esther has a "different look" than "us Manchester folk," he tells his friends, and that beauty, that "different look" helps along Esther's vanity so that they are unable to restrain her. Esther's regional beauty causes her to be "so puffed up, that there was no holding her in." Nationalist pride for England is in this novel writ small as regional pride for Manchester, and like *Cranford*, *Mary Barton* sees an invasion of foreign ideals, beauty, and beliefs. Esther's beauty is identified as foreign because its origins are foreign to Manchester; therefore to the people of Manchester like John Barton, she does not behave as the local women do.

John Barton's worst fears regarding Esther and her vanity are confirmed as his sister-in-law's difference moves her to the extreme of prostitution. Despite the fact that Esther abandons the factory lifestyle and the role expected for an "honest" working-class woman, she dons the ideal of "honesty" in order to approach her at-risk niece, Mary Barton. Unable to approach Mary as she is, Esther pawns her finery for

a suit of outer clothes, befitting the wife of a working man, a black silk bonnet, a printed gown, a plaid shawl, dirty and rather worn to be sure, but which had a sort of sanctity to the eyes of the street-walker, as being the appropriate garb of that happy class to which she could never, never more belong. (230)

Gaskell's language is very careful to demonstrate Esther's complete separation from Mary Barton. Esther is only able to secure "a suit of outer clothes"; while she wants to appear as "a mechanic's wife" (230), her inner or under clothes remain those of a prostitute. The muted colors and patterns of her borrowed clothes—the black bonnet and the printed gown—are only costume. The "plaid shawl, dirty and rather worn to be sure" will complete her ensemble. The text tells us that the plaid shawl "had a sort of sanctity to the eyes of the street-walker" as it is "the appropriate garb of that happy class to which she could never, never more belong." The shawl is not only appropriate; it is sacred as it embodies the very class status Esther can no longer claim. As a fallen woman, Esther is outside of class, and certainly outside of the ideals of class. The power of the shawl, as argued in my earlier discussion of *Cranford*, is in this sanctity it symbolizes. For Esther, however, the shawl also has even more power over her because it is part of the Manchester way of life she abandoned.

This garb and, in particular, this shawl are directly contrasted with Esther's previous street clothing. She may attempt to dress more respectably to approach Mary, but she approaches John in her working clothes. When John sees Esther for the first

time since she abandoned her family and her former, more respectable life as a factory girl, he knows that

the woman who stood by him was of no doubtful profession. It was told by her faded finery, all unfit to meet the pelting of that pitiless storm; the gauze bonnet, once pink, now dirty white, the muslin gown, all dragged, and soaking wet up to the very knees; the gay-coloured *barège* shawl, closely wrapped round the form, which yet shivered and shook. (121)

While later Esther dons a black bonnet common to working-class wives or widows, here she wears an impractical “gauze bonnet” which has faded with time and exposure to the weather. The costume gown in which she talks with Mary is printed, which suggests that it could be made of a cheaper, more durable calico, cotton print, or similar fabric.²¹

The muslin gown in which she talks to John is quite impractical for life on the streets, as it wrinkles and absorbs the elements so that she is “soaking wet up to the very knees.”

Esther’s exposure is at this moment a dual one; she is at risk from exposure to the weather and from exposure to prying eyes. Muslin, a thinner, lighter fabric, would cling to Esther’s body and possibly, without appropriate undergarments, become transparent, unlike a darker printed fabric which, by benefit of its print, would offer more visual protection for a woman’s body.²² But it is the difference in the shawls that truly marks Esther’s fall. When she attempts to appear respectable, her shawl is the sacred “plaid shawl” that marks a woman as respectable. On the street, her shawl is “gay-coloured,” signaling the garish colors with which prostitutes were stereotypically associated.

Perhaps worst of all for Esther’s character, however, is the shawl’s fabric; it is “*barège*,”

a sheer fabric originally made in Barèges, France.²³ As the shawl is “closely wrapped round [her] form,” it seems indistinguishable from Esther’s body itself. Esther has literally wrapped herself in finery, and French finery at that, which affords her no warmth as she “yet shivered and shook.” The shawl’s origins in France mark Esther as fallen, and fail to fulfill the very function of that specific article of clothing; unlike the Indian shawls which are, despite their foreign origins, solidly British, the barège shawl is unable to offer warmth and protection from external threats.²⁴

While both the novel and W. R. Greg’s reference to Esther in “Prostitution” are sympathetic to the “the once innocent Esther” (Gaskell 378), neither deny that her downfall is accelerated by her vanity and desire for pretty things. Esther tells Jem that for lack of “more sensible wants,” she spent her money “on dress and on eating” (157), carefully noting that for her, dress came before baser human needs, like food or shelter. Even after her fall, Esther is defined solely through her clothing, as the people of her new acquaintance view her clothing as extraordinary, even for a prostitute. At the end of the novel, Jem Wilson attempts to find Esther, and finds news only of a woman named “Butterfly,” named such “from the gaiety of her dress a year or two ago” (376). Even in death, Esther falls in fact, into “what appeared simply a heap of white or light-coloured clothes, fainting or dead,” the “poor crushed Butterfly” that Esther had been (378). Gaskell’s sympathy for her character is evident in the final identification of Esther. She was a bright frivolous thing, a “Butterfly,” beautiful and fragile, that had been “crushed” by the world around her. The use of the word “crushed” here suggests that Esther is not solely to blame for her fall, as butterflies cannot crush themselves. Gaskell’s concern

over Esther's path in life and further, the paths of similar women throughout England, is revealed in the designation of the "crushed Butterfly" as "poor." Ultimately, while Esther receives the punishment and judgment of the society in which she exists, she does not necessarily receive the punishment and judgment of the author.

The narration is unclear as to whether Esther's freedom or her love of frivolous artificials contributes more to her downfall, as her concerns for the younger Mary and thus her reason for contacting Jem are Mary's access to both. Esther begins her plea to Jem, stating, "I found out Mary went to learn dressmaking, and I began to be frightened for her," only after stating that "it's a bad life for a girl to be out late at night in the streets, and after many an hour of weary work, they're ready to follow after any novelty that makes a little change" (158). Esther's immediate response to Mary's apprenticeship to a dressmaker is fear; working for a dressmaker not only puts Mary in constant contact with so-called articles of vanity, but also requires long hours and time spent away from home.²⁵ Further, the extreme poverty of the dressmaker or seamstress and the often harsh conditions in which she worked is also cause for Esther's concern. She knows the danger that desperation brings, and she knows firsthand the difficulties of supporting a family on the wages supplied by work in the fashion industry. After her lover abandons her and her child, Esther sets up and keeps "a small-ware shop" selling the materials of fashion like the "bobbins and tapes" which are later seized by the landlord to pay rent (157). Esther tells Jem that her times were so desperate because her child had fallen ill, and she "could not mind my shop and her too" (157). Once things "grew worse and worse," Esther "sold [her] goods any how to get money to buy her food and medicine"

(157), and eventually in her maternal desperation turns to prostitution. But for Mary, it is not the time spent “at night in the streets” that represents danger; instead, the shop itself exposes her to dangerous men, talk, and ideas.

Mary’s work in the fashion industry is in Gaskell’s narration directly correlated to sexual danger; the dressmaker’s shop gives the appearance of seclusion, but cannot replicate the safety of home.²⁶ By its very nature, needlework is connected with the home, as sewing was an activity common to most women of all classes. Many Victorian novels depict images of home and hearth as images of women sewing, embroidering, or undertaking other forms of needlework. The dressmaker’s shop, alternatively, may be understood as the exposure of a private act in the public setting. Like fashion itself, the dressmaker’s shop is an awkward collusion of public and private. It is a place to make clothing to cover the body as well as a place to don and shed clothing for fittings; at the same time, it is still a marketplace open to the business of women and their male relatives or companions. When would-be seducer young Mr. Carson first takes notice of Mary, it is not on the street late at night as Esther fears, but rather at the shop itself. Only after first seeing Mary in the dressmaker’s shop does Mr. Carson approach her on the public street. The privacy of the shop itself and not the publicity of walking to and from work is the true seat of danger in Gaskell’s novel because it mixes the private and the commercial. It is the place to buy and sell the garments that settle intimately on the naked body. Mr. Carson takes full advantage of the strange intimacy of the dressmaker’s shop. He decides to “contriv[e] a meeting with the beautiful little milliner he had first seen while lounging in a shop where his sisters were making some

purchases, and afterwards never rested till he had freely, though respectfully, made her acquaintance in her daily walks” (78). The language of this passage argues that the dressmaker’s shop not only is a place where men can meet women, but also a place where men feel free to relax. The fact that Mr. Carson is “lounging in the shop” suggests that he has space to repose his body, the permission to do so granted by his middle-class status, and most importantly, the freedom to watch women move about their work.

The freedom of middle-class men to observe either working-class or unmarried women moving about their fashionable work is a common danger in Gaskell’s novels. We only need to recall the scene in *North and South* in which Mr. Lennox disrupts Margaret’s trying on of shawls to consider the sudden haste and flutter of women when a man is introduced into their private circle. But Gaskell’s 1853 novel *Ruth* introduces another fashion worker who is both of the same class and of the same beauty as Mary Barton and is thus in the same constant threat of sexual danger. When Ruth Hilton is chosen by her employer to attend a ball to stitch any rips or tears in the ladies’ ballgowns, she is picked precisely because she is pretty (12). On her hands and knees, stitching a ripped skirt, Ruth “threw her head back” to ask the woman to stand still and thus

caught the eye of the gentleman who was standing by; it was so expressive of amusement at the airs and graces of his pretty partner, that Ruth was infected by the feeling, and had to bend her face down to conceal the smile that mantled there. But not before he had seen it, and

not before his attention had thereby drawn to consider the kneeling figure.

(15)

Ruth's precise posture is one of subservience both to a member of the upper class and to the beauty of fashion, as she kneels before both. This submissive position paints Ruth as submissive, and highlights the difference between herself, an apprentice in a dressmaker's shop, and the woman before her, a lady of the upper classes.²⁷ Because of her occupation as a fashion worker, Ruth is introduced to a class which and to men who would otherwise be alien to her. But as her "noble head bent down to the occupation in which she was engaged," Mr. Bellingham is able to compare Ruth to the "flippant, bright, artificial queen" (15) before him, and to find Ruth the superior beauty.

Mr. Bellingham and Mr. Carson both have the freedom allotted to them by class and by sex to observe working-class women and, more importantly, to observe working-class women working.²⁸ This particular brand of voyeurism is complicated by the nature of fashion because fashion itself is inextricably connected to seeing and being seen. These men can use the rather public purpose of fashion, viewing clothing moving on bodies, particularly women's bodies, to gain access to fashion workers because these men can accompany their female relatives or companions to the dressmaker's shop. When accompanying women into the dressmaker's shop or the fashion worker's realm, like Ruth's place behind the scenes of the ball, these men use the privileges not only of their class but also of their sex to enter what would otherwise be a near-exclusive feminine space. While the nineteenth century sees a rise in men's involvement in women's fashion industry,²⁹ and while men have long been interested in their own

fashions,³⁰ the observational ability of a middle-class man with no practical connection to the fashion industry to watch the production and maintenance of women's fashion, particularly as performed by working-class women, seems anything but benign to writers like Gaskell and several of her characters. Esther recognizes the danger that the fashion industry offers a working-class unmarried woman such as Mary, but she associates that sexual danger with the freedom that work and monetary independence bring, much as it was in her own past. Gaskell instead expands the idea of sexual peril for working-class women to reside specifically and overwhelmingly in the creation, production, and maintenance of women's dress. Mr. Bellingham, Mr. Carson, and even Mr. Lennox all appear predatory in these novels, and their casual entrance into and comfort in such feminine-exclusive arenas suggests that women's fashion is created and worn solely for the benefit, enjoyment, and even seduction of men.³¹ The perpetuation of fashion in such arenas as women's magazines, however, belies this heterosexual imperative. Examining images that employ women actively gazing at unaware fashionable women, Sharon Marcus in her work *Between Women* sees fashion as an arena of feminine voyeurism, as well, all the more interesting because "the woman who looks at another in the plate does so all the more freely because she is unobserved" (131). In the industry of fashion, even the advertisements focus on the act of observing a woman with impunity, and this objectification of women is perpetuated both by men and by women.³²

Ultimately, fashion is made specifically to be observed, and thus its very meaning is intimately connected with visibility. In my previous chapter about *Vanity Fair*, I showed Becky Sharp observing and judging Amelia Sedley with freedom and

purpose; this is a pleasure for Becky, highlighted by her own vanity and selfishness, but for Amelia it is an excruciating torture. For the women in these novels, the pleasures and pains of observing and being observed in fashionable, or in Amelia's case, unfashionable clothing, is a constant part of the emphasis on the vanity of women. Ruth Hilton knows she is pretty, but even her good looks do not keep her from experiencing shame over her lack of appropriate dress. Ruth states, "I know I am pretty [...] but I am sorry I have no better gown, for this is very shabby. I am ashamed of it myself, and I can see Mrs. Mason is twice as much ashamed" (12). Ruth's companions express shock over Ruth's matter-of-factness about her own good looks, and Ruth answers their consternations by stating, "I could not help knowing [...] for many people have told me so" (12). While Ruth's understanding of her own beauty is judged as vanity by her fellow workers, she sees it as a fact of life she cannot change; in Ruth's eyes, it is not vanity to speak the truth. What is Ruth's vanity, however, appears in her shame over having "no better gown" than the shabby one she must wear to the ball. She is "ashamed of it" herself, and her recognition of her employer's reaction, who is "twice as much ashamed" of Ruth's dress, signals Ruth's understanding that women's fashion often is enjoyed primarily by women, and often is worn primarily for other women. Despite the access Mr. Carson and Mr. Bellingham have to observe fashion and those who work in its industry, women's fashion is, ultimately, about and for women.

For Mary Barton, too, female observation and enjoyment of fashion are intimate parts of a woman's life. When she is first to have tea with Alice, an old family friend, and a new woman not of her acquaintance, she is running late because

The truth was, Mary was dressing herself; yes, to come to poor old Alice's—she thought it worth while to consider what gown she should put on. It was not for Alice, however, you may be pretty sure; no, they knew each other too well. But Mary liked making an impression, and in this it must be owned she was pretty often gratified—and there was this strange girl to consider just now. So she put on her pretty new blue merino, made tight to her throat, her little linen collar and linen cuffs, and sallied forth to impress poor gentle Margaret. She certainly succeeded.

(30)

Mary, like the women of Cranford, decides that familiar, close acquaintances do not need to be impressed by what she wears, but “this strange girl,” Margaret, warrants both the compliment of Mary’s careful dressing and Mary’s desire to impress another woman of her age. The “pretty blue merino” she puts on is of higher quality fabric than the “dark stuff gown” that Margaret is wearing, as merino is a woolen fabric similar to cashmere and “stuff” is a “Fabric, without distinctive qualities” (Picken 338).³³ Mary’s “little linen collar and linen cuffs” speak of more money than Margaret’s “drab shawl or large handkerchief” that covers her neck and is “pinned down behind and at the sides in front” (30).³⁴ The contrast of the materials, Mary’s merino and linen compared to Margaret’s stuff and drab, suggests Mary’s money and her taste. While Mary is loosely of the same class as Margaret, her opportunities, defined by her ability to work in a dressmaker’s shop rather than in service or in piecemeal needlework like Margaret, allow her access to a sphere closed to Margaret.³⁵ In a different character like a Becky

Sharp, Mary's careful dressing would seem petty and mean; Mary, however, "came in half-blushing at her own self-consciousness" (30) even though she had succeeded in her intention of impressing her new friend. Despite Mary's blushing self-consciousness, she has only a "sort of dislike of the very observation she had taken such pains to secure" (30); another part of Mary craves the positive attention her dress brings to her. The positive attention Mary's dress affords her is not from men but from women, and it is ultimately that female attention that she craves. Mary wants the support and appreciation of her female companions, and dresses to please them, not Mr. Carson.

Ultimately, Mary and Esther are guilty of enjoying dress which is, for their Victorian audience, a signal of their vanity and selfishness. Esther's excessive love of dress leads directly to her sexual downfall, but Gaskell's portrayal of the "poor crushed Butterfly" asks the reader to sympathize rather than judge the fallen woman. Further, Mary's ultimate conclusion as a mother and the wife of the stalwart and true Jem Wilson offers her a new life away not only from the danger of the dressmaker's shop but also from the stigma of her near-fall. Gaskell understands fashion and dress as a near-exclusive feminine realm that can be, when exposed to the public and to men, dangerous for women. But as her novels like *North and South* show, fashion and dress are also avenues of power for women. This female understanding of dress and the positive attention it can bring a woman is not always denigrated in Victorian novels; sometimes it is celebrated and denigrated in the same text, as we see in *Mary Barton*. George Eliot's 1872 novel *Middlemarch* looks at women's relationship to fashion not necessarily in terms of personal morality or national character but rather in more complex terms of

personal enjoyment, feminine power, and what Harriet Martineau understands as the “will and pleasure of women” (“A Real Social Evil” 33).

“Their Own Taste and Convenience”³⁶: Fashion and Female Autonomy

On October 15, 1861, the *Daily News* published an article on “A Real Social Evil” in which Harriet Martineau argues against the very popular crinoline at the height of fashion in the 1860s, and recounts several serious and even fatal injuries caused to both wearers of the crinoline and passersby. Martineau notes that

Nothing can be more distasteful to us, and to many others who will say “Amen!” to the comment of this jury than the petty tyranny which overbears the will and pleasure of women in regard to their dress, or which annoys them in their proper work and amusement of arranging themselves according to their own taste and convenience. (33)

Martineau begins her plea by offering a common bond between herself and her reader.

Both of “us” are intelligent and rational, and therefore both of “us” can see the ridiculousness of a fashion which, as Martineau reminds us, originated in France (34).

Martineau blames these French fashions for more than the sway they hold over Englishwomen; she argues that the crinoline and hoop popularized in France and followed by all women “senselessly” is an “evil” which is “responsible for more deaths [...] than any other fashion ever caused” (34). She also sees outside influence over a woman’s fashion as a “petty tyranny which overbears the will and pleasure of women in

regard to their dress,” and the acquiescence to the current trend of the crinoline to be contrary to “their own taste and convenience.”

For Martineau, French influence over English dress is not solely to blame for the popularity and seeming permanence of the crinoline. Rather, Englishwomen’s conformity to current fashion trends is to blame. She argues that some believe a lack of individualism forces “Our countrywomen [...] to follow a fashion abjectly” because they have, “we are told [...] a horror of appearing independent in their judgment about external appearances, and of earning the name of being ‘strong-minded women’” (36). Martineau again uses language of familiarity, speaking directly to a community composed of “our” and “we.” So, too, does she speak of the women of England as “our countrywomen”; despite their sometimes fatal fashionable choices, these women are in Martineau’s estimation still recognizable as Englishwomen. They are not the women unrecognizable as English detested by Eliza Lynn Linton. Martineau urges women to become strong-minded and independent so that they can enjoy fashion as an “amusement of arranging themselves according to their own taste and convenience.” For Martineau, a woman’s strong-mindedness and independence are best demonstrated in her ability to display herself fashionably and well, according to her “own taste and convenience” than the taste and convenience of a society at large.

Martineau concludes her piece with a call to Queen and Country in which she asks her countrywomen to “follow the royal example which we anticipate” (37) of decrying the crinoline, as Queen Victoria exhibits rationality in the decisions about fashion for herself and for the royal household. Even if Queen Victoria does not outlaw

the crinoline overtly, Martineau still insists that her countrywomen “act without [the royal decree] in that sphere of home in which every English matron is a queen” (37). In her estimation, the home and England are synonymous; by stating that “every English matron is a queen,” Martineau states that the home over which this queen rules is her nation. In a discussion of women’s fashionable choices that urges them to consider their “own taste and convenience,” Martineau’s understanding of the home as nation makes every fashionable choice a significant one, weighted with national import. An English woman is the queen of her home, and her home is both the home, that physical place of residence, and the Home, the country in which she lives. Martineau never denounces fashion itself, and instead views it a female “amusement” that is important enough to deserve a call to Queen and Country; in this equation, Martineau supports a woman’s interest in fashion as socially and nationally acceptable, as long as it is “according to [women’s] own taste and convenience.” She urges women to make autonomous choices in their fashions to demonstrate the rationality she expects of her countrywomen, and to use “their own free will” (37) in matters of dress. Even if her Queen does not outlaw the crinoline directly, Martineau trusts Englishwomen to act rationally in their own homes, that place “in which every English matron is a queen.”

Declaring fashion to be an “amusement” that can in fact be considered “proper work” that depends upon the “will and pleasure of women,” Martineau justifies feminine interest in dress. Her diatribe against a particular fashion trend is not a diatribe against fashion itself; rather, she sees the continued insistence on an unwieldy and even dangerous trend such as the crinoline to be detrimental to women. She insists that

women have the authority to make decisions over their own fashions and, by extension, their own bodies. What Martineau calls for in this essay is both Englishwomen's autonomy over their own clothing and Englishwomen's refusal to succumb to ridiculous or even dangerous fashions, particularly if they are foreign in origin. For Martineau, enjoyment of fashion is not a signal of vanity, while blind acquiescence to fashion trends, no matter how ridiculous or cumbersome, is. While she refers to several working-class women and the dangers they experience while wearing the crinoline or the preposterousness they exhibit while insisting on wearing it, she ends her text with a call to the English matron and thus the sanctity of the middle-class home, where she is "a queen." Martineau's text insists that women's fashion be moderated and determined by women themselves in general, and by each individual woman herself, in particular.

Fashion is, for Martineau, a woman's concern, and autonomy over her own fashions and by extension her own body is a woman's right. With this declaration, Martineau establishes that dress and, more specifically, fashionable dress are important components of women's lives. Martineau views women's fashionable choices as choices; even deciding to follow bad or dangerous fashion trends like the crinoline is an autonomous decision. She argues that "to uphold a fashion" as dangerous as the crinoline requires a "dreadful strength of mind" (36), and Martineau urges her countrywomen to use that "strength of mind" not for "dreadful" purposes, but rather to make rational choices for beautiful and safe fashions. In short, Martineau wishes for individuality in women's fashions, and that choice she wishes that her countrywomen would display is dependent on the enjoyment and understanding of fashion and their

own bodies. Despite her vehemence against the crinoline, Martineau appreciates fashion and dress, and wishes her countrywomen to do the same. Her call to Queen and Country in a discussion of fashion expresses the importance of fashion to the English nation at large. Gaskell's novels love women's clothing, too, and the constant connections between fashion and nation argue for fashion's importance in the literature of the nineteenth century, particularly in the representation of women. While the love of dress often is defaulted to sexuality and vanity in the nineteenth century, Martineau and Gaskell offer an alternative and sympathetic view of women's fashionable choices.

Like Gaskell and Martineau before her, George Eliot loves fashion and dress. All three women writers respond to a national portrayal of a woman's love and understanding of fashion as a negative trait, and Eliot does so by directly supporting a woman's personal style.³⁷ First and foremost in Eliot's 1871-72 novel *Middlemarch*, the entire town of Middlemarch is built on the manufacture, sale, and distribution of fashionable accoutrements. In "The Materiality of *Middlemarch*," Kate Flint reminds us that "The society of Middlemarch is bound up with the material in the most literal of senses. The town's economy, like that of its outlying villages, relied heavily on the textile industry—specifically, the weaving of silk ribbons" (67). The entire town is dependent on fashion and, in particular, female fashion accessories. Further, the town of Middlemarch and its livelihood are ultimately representative of the manufacture on which England so praised itself, and which Martineau believes can help raise England in international esteem. It is no wonder, then, that women's fashion should be of such importance to the townspeople of Middlemarch and also to the novel's author. The first

chapter of Eliot's novel, for example, begins with the famous line that "Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress" (33). Her figure and bone structure are declared as "so finely formed that she could wear sleeves not less bare of style than those in which the Blessed Virgin appeared to Italian painters" (33).

The comparison of Dorothea to a religious figure like the Blessed Virgin or, more commonly in the novel, Saint Theresa, suggests Dorothea's purity and spirituality, but also suggests Dorothea's Renaissance beauty and artistic perfection. The text argues that Dorothea does not need fashionable clothing because such dress would only detract from the beauty of her self: "her profile as well as her stature and bearing seemed to gain the more dignity from her plain garments, which by the side of provincial fashion gave her the impressiveness of a fine quotation from the Bible" (33). Throughout the novel, Dorothea's fashion sense seems, to outside observers, to be contrary; she does not follow traditional or accepted modes of fashion but rather selects dress based on how that clothing best suits her. The "plain garments" she wears highlight her "profile as well as her stature and bearing," all of which "seemed to gain the more dignity" from the clothing she herself has particularly chosen. The more "provincial fashions" of the women around her only serve to underscore the complimentary nature of her dress, which the novel indicates has "the impressiveness of a fine quotation from the Bible."

Like *Cranford*, *Middlemarch* is set in the 1830s just before the Reform debates change the face of England, and, like *Cranford*, *Middlemarch* establishes economy of dress as a socially acceptable response to monetary troubles. Dorothea's plain dress could be attributed to the "well-bred economy, which in those days made show in dress

the first item to be deducted from, when any margin was required for expenses more distinctive of rank” (33), which would support the book’s assertion that Dorothea is tasteful in style and in substance. By avoiding showiness, the elegance of economy the Cranford Amazons also practice, Dorothea and the people of Middlemarch who avoid “show in dress” demonstrate their good taste in not overdressing around those who, financially, cannot. The narration also very carefully tells us that “Such reasons would have been enough to account for plain dress, quite apart from religious feeling; but in Miss Brooke’s case, religion alone would have determined it” (33).³⁸ For Dorothea, economy is not the reason for her relatively plain dress, nor is just the “pride of being ladies” (33). Her plain dress is according to her personal choice, not according to her domestic economy or her class status, which the novel tells us is “not exactly aristocratic” but still “unquestionably ‘good’” (33). Dorothea’s sister, Celia, wears dress that, in contrast to her sister’s, has “a shade of coquetry in its arrangements” (33), but this dress differs from Dorothea’s only slightly. Celia wears “scarcely more trimmings” than Dorothea, and “it was only to close observers that her dress differed from her sister’s” (33). Understanding that fashion and dress are, by their very nature, made to be visible, Dorothea and Celia avoid the side by side comparison of “plain garments” and “provincial fashion.” The rather plain garments Dorothea wears complement her body, her posture, her coloring, and her beauty; as her sister, Celia must resemble Dorothea at least slightly. Therefore the two women’s similar dress is complimentary to them both, and Celia’s “shade of coquetry in [her dress’s] arrangements” offers further emphasis of the choice both women demonstrate over their clothing.

Although Eliot declares herself to be rather judgmental of “Silly novels by lady novelists,” particularly those of the “*mind-and-millinery* species” with a heroine who is “usually an heiress [... who] is perfectly well-dressed and perfectly religious” (“Silly Novels by Lady Novelists” 90) among other designators, Dorothea is seemingly all three. Yet both Dorothea’s contrariness in fashion and her personal style offer an alternative to the “mind-and-millinery” novels that Eliot denigrates. While *Middlemarch* is interested in the clothing of its female characters, it is less interested in *what* their fashionable choices are than *why*; Eliot details the intricacies of dress and fashion in order to argue for the taste, style, and fashionable autonomy of women in contrast to a national standard that understands women’s love of dress as simple vanity and the antithesis of English womanhood. When the Brooke sisters first explore and divide up their mother’s jewels among themselves, Dorothea’s taste and ability to accessorize fashion to best suit a woman’s beauty is revealed to be not only applicable to her own body, but also to the bodies of other women. When she opens the jewelry box, Dorothea “immediately took up the necklace” of “purple amethysts set in exquisite gold work” and “fastened it round her sister’s neck, where it fitted almost as closely as a bracelet; but the circle suited the Henrietta-Maria style of Celia’s head and neck,” and tells her sister that she must “wear that with your Indian muslin” (38). Dorothea recognizes that the shape of Celia’s head and neck was popular in the seventeenth century, and the choker style of the necklace would complement Celia’s shape and would emphasize her neck when worn with a lighter gown like the Indian muslin.³⁹ Also, Dorothea knows intimately the contents of Celia’s wardrobe; while the Brooke sisters are not extremely wealthy, they

are not of an economic status that would necessitate only one or two dresses. While we cannot assume either Celia's or Dorothea's wardrobe to be plentiful, we can assume that both women have their fair share of clothing, as the descriptions of the women's dress frequently change in the novel. In short, Dorothea knows her fashion.

Dorothea and Celia enjoy not only the beautiful jewelry left to them by their mother, but also the act of appreciating fashion together. Dorothea's ability instantly to recognize what would be both attractive and complimentary on another woman argues for her understanding of fashion. Further, the novel refuses to determine either Dorothea or Celia as excessively vain for their attention to details of dress, and in particular, the accessorizing of dress.⁴⁰ The novel immediately establishes Dorothea as exemplary of womanly and Christian virtue, so when she exhibits what her sister views as a "weakness" (39) for an emerald ring and bracelet, Dorothea is in fact exhibiting her strength. She recognizes that the emeralds are the finest jewels in the box, and that they suit her best. Dorothea exhibits both her taste and her recognition of her own style in this moment. By taking the finest jewels in the box, she takes those of the best quality. But by taking them because they suit her best, she demonstrates that her taste is of the finest quality. Also, Dorothea acknowledges that the very act of wearing the emeralds is enjoyable; when she returns to her work, she does not remove the jewels, and "She thought of often having them by her, to feed her eye at these little fountains of pure colour" (39). The language of this passage suggests Dorothea's female vanity from her enjoyment of the emeralds, even when her sister's jealousy causes her to ask if Dorothea intends to wear the elaborate jewels in public (39). While Dorothea and Celia may think

Dorothea is above the pettiness of vanity, in fact she is not; rather, the language of the passage offers the vision of beautiful things, those “little fountains of pure colour,” as an acceptable reason for what some may deem as vanity. The emeralds are described as natural and vital to survival; Dorothea does not just enjoy the emerald ring and bracelet; she will “feed her eye” with them.⁴¹ Further, Dorothea’s moment of vanity is subsumed by her superior taste. She does not take “her full share of jewels” (40), which Celia is angry over, but rather only the ones that complement her best.⁴²

Dorothea’s taste in and discernment of both fashion and people are reiterated throughout the text, and while her choices are often seen as contrary, they are decidedly autonomous. The most interesting choices for Dorothea come in her fashions, and even her choice of hairstyle is dependent on its becoming nature rather than its popularity. Dorothea is determined to wear what is most flattering to herself. She

wore her brown hair flatly braided and coiled behind so as to expose the outline of her head in a daring manner at a time when public feeling required the meagreness of nature to be dissimulated by tall barricades of frizzed curls and bows, never surpassed by any great race except the Feejeean. (50)

Her hairstyle is described in terms of revelation and shock; Dorothea wears her hair specifically “to expose the outline of her head” in what at the time was considered to be “a daring manner.” This exposure’s daring quality is precisely its revelation of the naturalness of the shape of her head; Dorothea does not hide the “meagreness” of nature, a short forehead or unflatteringly shaped brow, by “tall barricades of frizzed curls and

bows,” which the novel equates not to England but to a foreign race. In this moment, then, the hairstyle Dorothea chooses to wear is, by default, more English than the hairstyles currently popular in England.

Dorothea’s “daring manner” in her hairstyle is daring not only because it exposes the naturalness of her body in a way that best pleases Dorothea, but also because it is not the commonly accepted fashion for women’s hair. In this moment, Dorothea’s choice of personal style over what is fashionable is emphasized, and Eliot argues that personal style, what Martineau would call a woman’s “own taste and convenience,” is not a rejection of social mores. Rather, it is an assertion of women’s power and autonomy in the fashionable arena and further, in the English nation at large. Eliot’s novel rejects Victorian ideology for womanhood throughout its plot, and does so in order to best demonstrate that Dorothea’s personal choices—in fashion, in business, and in love—may be disastrous to her, but they are not disastrous to the social or national landscape of the time. Dorothea rejects fashion in favor of stylistic choice. By examining this through the lens of fashion or, in Dorothea’s case, antifashion, we can see that fashion is as important to Eliot as it is to other women novelists of the time. The personal choices that Dorothea makes in her own dress could be considered unfashionable in that she does not always follow the fashion trends of the 1830s, but it is not because Dorothea is unaware of those fashions. To be unfashionable is to be unaware of fashionable trends. Rather, Dorothea is antifashionable, because she is not ignorant of the prevailing fashions but rather rejects them outright in favor of dress more flattering to her beauty.⁴³ In Eliot’s novel, Dorothea’s taste and personal style are held in higher esteem than

socially decreed fashionable dress, and is, in Eliot's presentation, what fashion should ultimately be.⁴⁴ In this presentation of Dorothea, then, Eliot, like Martineau, understands dress not as an arena of judgment for women but rather an arena of power for women.⁴⁵

The novel emphasizes Dorothea's beauty and her taste, both of which are traits that serve her well throughout the novel as she makes personal decisions regarding dress accordingly.⁴⁶ In her work *Dressed in Fiction*, Clair Hughes argues that "Dressing is one activity that Dorothea can control. Unwilling to conform to gender codes that correlate femininity to external ornament, her appearance can be read as a dissenting experiment in self-representation and therefore arguably egoistic playacting" (94).⁴⁷ While I agree that "dress is one activity that Dorothea can control" and that control comes as an unwillingness to conform, I think her dress is too important to view only in terms of a refusal of gender conformity. Rather, Dorothea's dressing is a purposeful attention to fashion, rather than an outright rejection of it. Like the women in the fashionable advertisements that Sharon Marcus studies, Dorothea has the power to look, and the power to look back. Unlike Becky Sharp, Dorothea does not use that fashionable power to belittle other women, but rather, to express commonality and, most importantly for Dorothea, love. In sharing the jewelry with Celia, for example, and noting the most flattering dresses Celia should wear with each piece, Dorothea demonstrates that in Eliot's estimation, admiring and enjoying fashion is not a signal of female vanity. Rather, it is an expression of what Martineau believes is the "will and pleasure of women." Dorothea, therefore, is not the martyred character that her "plain

garments” might otherwise suggest; she is a beautiful woman who understands the construction and dissemination of beauty.

In fact, most of the oddness attributed to Dorothea’s dress is in her decisive dressing for the benefit of herself and other women, not for men. At a dinner party prior to her wedding to Casaubon, Dorothea wears a “silver-gray dress—the simple lines of her dark-brown hair parted over her brow and coiled massively behind, in keeping with the entire absence from her manner and expression of all search after mere effect” (96). Gray is a common color for Dorothea, and one that is very flattering to her form and coloring. On her honeymoon, in fact, she wears “Quakerish gray drapery” that causes Will Ladislaw and his artistic companion to admire her (176).⁴⁸ Her hairstyle, too, is typical of her standard dress, as the “simple lines” of it emphasize her face and the coil of hair “massively behind” her head would emphasize the delicacy of her neck. But the narration’s notice that absent from “her manner and expression” was the “search after mere effect” argues that Dorothea wears this style precisely because it offers her enjoyment, not because she wishes others to admire her. Unlike Mary Barton who wears her best dress to impress her new friend, Margaret, Dorothea wears this clothing like she chooses the emerald jewelry: because she gains personal enjoyment from them. Clothing is, for Dorothea, a personal expression and a pleasant sensation. When one man of her acquaintance notices that she is “an uncommonly fine woman, by God!” (97), his companion responds that she is “not my style of woman: I like a woman who lays herself out a little more to please us” (97). Here, Eliot directly equates the construction of a woman’s dress and outward self with the social belief that women

dress beautifully for men. In dressing for herself, in experiencing pleasure solely from wearing the clothing she wishes to wear, Dorothea contradicts the common social expectations for women's clothing. She denies the commonly held assumptions of women's vanity—her attention to dress is often misunderstood as an inattention—and she denies the commonly held assumptions of women's fashionable choices—she dresses as Martineau urges all Englishwomen to dress, according to her own taste, amusement, and style. Eliot creates a new standard of beauty with Dorothea in creating a female character that understands the social expectations of fashion but instead chooses to please her eyes, her senses, and her self.

Also at the dinner party is Rosamond Vincy, the character who represents the opposite ideal of womanhood from Dorothea, and who is in this scene held up as the more beautiful and desirable woman of the two. One of the men in this conversation declares that he prefers his women “blond, with a certain gait, and a swan neck. [...] If I were a marrying man I should choose Miss Vincy before either of [the Brooke sisters]” (98). Rosamond is the most socially fashionable woman in the text. Her dress is of such “fit and fashion” that “no dressmaker could look at it without emotion” (353). Rosamond fulfills the social expectations for fashion; when “no dressmaker could look” at her dress “without emotion,” the dressmaker sees Rosamond's potential for displaying fashion, not fashion's potential for highlighting Rosamond. The novel's ultimate comparison of the two women argues that fashionably conscious Rosamond and antifashionable but stylish Dorothea are two representations of the female love of fashion. While Dorothea's personal style is antifashionable for the time, she understands

female aestheticism. Rosamond, too, understands female aestheticism and the social expectations for unmarried women of her beauty and class. Unlike Dorothea, however, Rosamond embraces the social understanding of women as beautiful objects and sees herself as an “exquisite ornament” (464).

Rosamond’s understanding of herself as beautiful is in part due to her “excellent taste in costume” (103) and her understanding of her own body. Even when walking into a room Rosamond enters “bearing up her riding-habit with much grace” (112), demonstrating that she understands how her body moves within clothing, and in short, how her body moves. She has “a habitual gesture with her as pretty as any movements of a kitten’s paw” of reaching up “her hand to touch her wondrous hair-plaits” (151). Like Amelia Sedley, Rosamond learns the movement, style, and grace socially understood as the province of beautiful women at school; she learns her more kittenish movements during her education at Mrs. Lemon’s (151), and thus understands the artificiality in the construction of female beauty. Even when she takes off her hat, she “adjust[s] her veil, and applie[s] little touches of her finger-tips to her hair” (115). Rosamond is constantly aware of how her body fits in and understands fashion, and also of how best to figure herself to be beautiful. When Dorothea pays her visit to the new Mrs. Lydgate, Rosamond welcomes the attention because “What is the use of being exquisite if you are not seen by the best judges?” (353). Rosamond understands Dorothea to be “one of those country divinities not mixing with Middlemarch mortality” (353). When compared to Dorothea and her simple yet utterly flattering antifashionable dress, Rosamond naturally is viewed as just as beautiful but too well put together. Not

only is Rosamond's dress so perfect that the dressmaker would weep, but her "large embroidered collar" was worn precisely so that "all beholders would know the price of" it and her "controlled self-consciousness of manner" is described as the "expensive substitute for simplicity" (353). Here, Eliot establishes that Rosamond's faults are not in her fashions but in her fashionability; she has learned what it is to be fashionable from her school, from her society, and from her peers. Like Dorothea, Rosamond understands what is flattering on her; unlike Dorothea, Rosamond does not make her own fashionable choices. Her awareness of fashion trends and details of dress make her choices for her. Rosamond can construct a beautiful attractive self, but she cannot compete with Dorothea for independence of thought in dress. In this sense, then, Rosamond is the more nationally desirable ideal of womanhood, while Dorothea, and not Rosamond, is the more fashionably avant-garde woman of the two.

The novel recognizes Rosamond's awareness of the construction of womanhood and femininity, arguing that she was "not one of those helpless girls who betray themselves unawares, and whose behaviour is awkwardly driven by their impulses, instead of being steered by wary grace and propriety" (234). Eliot establishes "wary grace and propriety" as the artificial construction of womanhood, and contrasts it with the more natural awkward impulses of "helpless girls who betray themselves unawares." But Eliot is not disapproving of Rosamond's self-construction or the fact that she never "showed any unbecoming knowledge, and was always that combination of correct sentiments, music, dancing, drawing, elegant note-writing, private album for extracted

verse, and perfect blond loveliness” (235), all the required accomplishments for a young lady of Rosamond’s class position. Instead, the narrative entreats the reader to

Think no unfair evil of her, pray: she had no wicked plots, nothing sordid or mercenary; in fact, she never thought of money except as something necessary which other people would always provide. She was not in the habit of devising falsehoods, and if her statements were no direct clue to fact, why, they were not intended in that light—they were among her elegant accomplishments, intended to please. Nature had inspired many arts in finishing Mrs Lemon’s favorite pupil, who by general consent [...] was a rare compound of beauty, cleverness, and amiability. (235)

These estimations of Rosamond’s worth are gently mocking of Rosamond, but more scathing about the so-called accomplishments offered to women of Rosamond’s class, age, and status. Rosamond has the benefits of beauty and cleverness, but she does not have the benefits of social expectation. Because she is beautiful, she is more prone to the “many arts in finishing” at Mrs. Lemon’s school. By never showing “any unbecoming knowledge,” Rosamond always fits neatly into a paradigm of early-nineteenth-century womanhood best defined by the litany of talents such as music, drawing, or “perfect blond loveliness.” She is the height of English womanhood, and she is to be pitied for it.

The language of this passage, however, emphasizes an alternative to traditional understandings of fashionable, accomplished women. While the novel still compares Dorothea and Rosamond and ultimately finds Rosamond wanting, *Middlemarch*

sympathizes with the few recourses Rosamond has. She is not “wicked,” “sordid or mercenary,” and therefore the reader should “think no unfair evil of her.” If she happened to tell falsehoods, they were not devised but rather ignorant of fact.

Middlemarch insists that Rosamond’s vanity is not evil. Rather, Rosamond’s desire for beautiful things is all she knows, as her understanding of herself as a beautiful thing or an “exquisite ornament to the drawing-room” (464) is all she knows. *Middlemarch* pities Rosamond for this reason, and voices a maid’s internal monologue that notes “there never did anybody look so pretty in a bonnet, poor thing” when Rosamond walks by “in her walking dress” (594). Her prettiness, superior to anyone else’s, is a cause for sympathy even from the servants. And even the servants recognize that Rosamond’s beauty is dependent on her ability to dress herself; Rosamond is not pretty solely due to nature, but rather, is pretty “in a bonnet.” She is beautiful only because she is able to dress as her society expects her to dress.

Eliot’s presentation of Rosamond is dependent on the character’s learned construction and development of fashion, but Rosamond’s fashionable self is the national standard of beauty. As we have seen with many Victorian texts like *Cranford*, references to fashion are intertwined with references to France, and in *Middlemarch*, suggestions that Rosamond aligns herself with French ideas and fashions is spoken not through narration but through the conversation of gossiping Middlemarch matriarchs. After the murder scandal involving Mr. Bulstrode, the women of Middlemarch note that the family will probably “go and live abroad somewhere” as “That is what is generally done when there is anything disgraceful in a family” (576). They express sympathy for

his wife, Harriet, who “wears very neat patterns always” and always “wishes to do right” to her society through her fashion (576). Despite Harriet’s enjoyment of dress, the Middlemarch women do not believe that she will enjoy France, arguing “how hard it will be for her to go among foreigners” (576). While Harriet’s attention to fashion is forgivable, even though she and her daughters “had new Tuscan bonnets” on in church the day before, the same cannot be said for her niece, Rosamond. The women of Middlemarch note that many believe Rosamond’s husband, Lydgate, “ought to have kept among the French” which would “suit *her* well enough, I dare say” as there is “that kind of lightness about her. But she got that from her mother; she never got it from her aunt Bulstrode, who always gave her good advice, and to my knowledge would rather have had her marry elsewhere” (576, emphasis original). The “kind of lightness about” Rosamond is in the context of the conversation seemingly rooted in Rosamond’s attention to fashion, even at the expense of her husband’s well-being and character.⁴⁹ Eliot ultimately connects Rosamond’s national standard of womanhood—fashionable, beautiful, vain, and superficial—with the very Frenchness the English standard of female beauty supposedly abhors.

Eliot’s conclusion about an Englishwoman’s love of fashion is not a decree against female vanity or an abhorrence of the French influence over English fashion. Rather, her ambivalent ending for Rosamond—happy in a marriage to a wealthy, elderly gentleman—gives Rosamond everything she has longed for throughout the novel. Her conclusion is the “very pretty show” she made with “her daughters, driving out in her carriage” (638). Antifashionable Dorothea is happy in the end, as well, rejecting the

wealthy life so many others wanted for her in order to marry Will Ladislaw. So, too, does she seemingly reject dress, as she tells Will “I want so little—no new clothes” (622). Of course Dorothea does not want new clothes; she never has, as she is quite happy with the clothing she already owns. Ultimately, *Middlemarch* loves fashion as much as some critics argue George Eliot herself did,⁵⁰ and in its construction of women’s genuine interest in dress, Eliot’s novel argues that a woman’s love of fashion and further, her understanding of dress and how best to complement her body and her beauty, is not a signal of vanity, or the first step toward a sexual fall, or even reason for national concern. Eliot, like Martineau, sees that the “petty tyranny which overbears the will and pleasure of women in regard to their dress” (33) is what forces the social understanding of women’s love of fashion to mere vanity. For Eliot, Martineau, and, to no small extent, Gaskell, the “petty tyranny which overbears” women and their attention to and love of fashion and dress is the social and national expectations for English womanhood. As the final chapter will show, the nineteenth century’s understanding of women’s use and manipulation of fashion will reach its critical point during the suffrage movement, when militant and non-militant protesters alike use and manipulate fashion to communicate the national role they are denied as women.

Notes

¹ For further discussion of women’s symbolic representation of nation, please see my discussion on Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Cranford* in Chapter II of this dissertation.

² Some examples include Anna Brownell Jameson's "The Milliners" (1843), Margaret Oliphant "The Condition of Women" (1858), and Frances Power Cobbe's "What Shall We Do with Our Old Maids?" (1862), among others.

³ In her article "'Waste Not, Want Not': Even Redundant Women Have Their Uses," Carmen Faymonville notes that "The increased attention to the question of female emigration, however, can be attributed to the publication of the 1851 census, which suggested that Britain suffered from a dramatic oversupply of women: out of the total population, at that time about twenty-seven million, there were about 650,000 more women than men. The underlying causes were a naturally high male-infant mortality, numerous wars that had afforded great casualties, and the economically motivated migration of young men" (65-6). This "surplus" of women of course assumes a heterosexist imperative on the part of the Victorian audience, as each woman unpaired with a man is considered "odd" or "redundant."

⁴ W. R. Greg's article "Why Are Women Redundant?" for the April 1862 edition of the *National Review* argues for emigration as a solution to the large population of unmarried women in England.

⁵ Frances Power Cobbe argues against this solution in "What Shall We Do with Our Old Maids?" (1862) and instead sees education as a necessary next step for helping the growing population of unmarried women become self-sufficient and financially independent.

⁶ There is a large body of criticism devoted to discussions of the physical and mental plight of the fashion worker, particularly the seamstress. For further information, please see Lynn M. Alexander's *Women, Work, and Representation: Needlewomen in Victorian Art and Literature*, Beth Harris's edited collection *Famine and Fashion: Needlewomen in the Nineteenth Century*, Deborah Anna Logan's *Fallenness in Victorian Women's Writing: Marry, Stitch, Die, or Do Worse*, and Deborah Morse's article "Stitching Repentance, Sewing Rebellion: Seamstresses and Fallen Women in Elizabeth Gaskell's Fiction."

⁷ The quotation that helps to introduce her argument, made after reading the original report to which Jameson responds, focuses on the pleasure of viewing fashion and how that now knowing the suffering of the fashion workers, is lost forever. Jameson quotes an unidentified person who "After reading Mr. Grainger's Report, and the body of evidence he adduces," states that he or she will "have no more pleasure [at the Court Fancy Ball]: I shall have before my eyes a score of the makers of those gay dresses in their coffins" (1). This statement brings to mind a series of *vanitas* paintings and sketches that illuminate the death or destruction of the fashion worker contrasted with the vanity of the women for whom the dresses were made. One of the most famous is

Punch's "The Haunted Lady, or 'The Ghost in the Looking-Glass,'" as presented in Lynn M. Alexander's *Women, Work, and Representation* (169).

⁸ In his article "Filthy Lucre: Victorian Ideas of Money," Christopher Herbert reminds us that while "Sex is of course the area most famously tabooed in Victorian discourse" so is money, "not that these two subjects, sex and money, can ever be cleanly dissociated, as every text of nineteenth-century fiction reminds us" (186).

⁹ Gayle Rubin's influential article "The Traffic in Women" offers an in-depth discussion of the various ways in which women's bodies have been bought and sold as a trade between men. While her theory speaks most specifically about prostitution and marriage and its benefits for men, it can also be applied to the transactions involving women's bodies and their benefits for women of higher classes.

¹⁰ William Acton's study *Prostitution* identifies prostitutes by their clothing, and the better dressed prostitutes are in relatively better positions than those who are dressed poorly. I will return to this study later in this chapter.

¹¹ From William Acton's *Prostitution* (24).

¹² Acton argues, "I propose to show that concentrated effort, sanctioned by authority, can alone stay the ravages of a contagious and deadly disorder, and that only by methodical and combined action, and by gradual and almost imperceptible stages, can any moral cure be effected" (24).

¹³ In his article "William Acton, the Truth about Prostitution, and Hardy's Not-So-Ruined Maid," Stanley Renner argues that while some critics see Hardy's poem as an ironic, tongue-in-cheek discussion of the "easy" life prostitutes lead, Hardy in fact "wrote this poem in 1866, the year that saw the passage of the Contagious Diseases Act" that was followed a decade after William Acton's *Prostitution*, both of which surely influenced Hardy's poem (19).

¹⁴ Renner informs us that this fall back into local slang and dialect is to Patricia Clements and Juliet Grindle's 1980 study evidence of Hardy's ironic intentions, but Renner instead argues that "her use of 'ain't is not ambiguous evidence of illiteracy. For among the English gentry (as well as those of the American South) the proper use of 'ain't' for 'am not' was actually a sign of sophistication and security of social position" (26).

¹⁵ Suzanne Daly's article "Kashmir Shawls in Mid-Victorian Novels" notes that "As part of the mid-century material everyday, shawls were an immediate and potent marker of women's status, especially when the women were outside their homes. [...] Poor women, however, were assumed to wear shawls of domestic manufacture made of

wool or cotton” (238). Daly reads this scene of *Mary Barton* here, and also discusses Aunt Esther’s use of the shawl as a form of costume, a scene I will discuss further in this chapter.

¹⁶ This image of the factory girl in traditional shawl is employed throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. We will see an image of such a factory girl, a demonstrating Suffragette, in Chapter V.

¹⁷ This is, of course, not Gaskell’s usual presentation of the effects of factory work in pre-Reform Manchester. *North and South* details the often-fatal horrors female factory workers experience in the mills. But in *Mary Barton*, the concern for women is not factory work, and both Mary and Esther are in danger of sexual falls precisely because they reject the factory work most women of their age and class accept. Their danger lies in their proximity to fashion.

¹⁸ Their companions are ill-looking, as well, and their twin children are described as “feeble” and “frail” (7).

¹⁹ There are critics who would disagree with this argument, however, as work in the factory also does signal sexual freedom for women. In her chapter “The Deep Romance of Manchester: Gaskell’s ‘Mary Barton,’” Harriet Guest argues that “The implication that women workers waste their incomes on the luxuries of dress, which lead them into vanity and sexual immorality, is associated for Barton with a freedom of movement which may not have been unusual for working-class women, but which is cast, by the dominance of middle-class notions of street politeness and feminine domesticity, as a further intimation of immorality” (90-91). My work builds on the work of critics such as Guest’s and expands these ideas of the association of work and freedom in the fashion trade with immorality to examine as well the role of fabric, fashion, dress, and textiles to signal women’s morality.

²⁰ My understanding of the determination of “Us” and “Them” comes from Lindy Colley’s *Britons* (6).

²¹ *A Dictionary of Costume and Fashion, Historic and Modern* defines calico as in the United States, a “plain-woven cotton cloth printed with figured pattern on one side” which was originally expensive when first made but then more affordable when manufactured with cheaper cotton (42-43). In England, calico could mean a “plain white cotton cloth. So called for Calicut, India, where cotton textiles were first printed” (43).

²² *A Dictionary of Costume and Fashion, Historic and Modern* defines muslin as “Soft cotton fabric of firm, loose, plain weave; bleached or unbleached. Used for dresses, undergarments, sheets, pillowcases, shirts” (228).

²³ *A Dictionary of Costume and Fashion, Historic and Modern* defines barège as a “Sheer, gauze-like fabric of wool combined with silk, cotton, etc. Used for veils, dresses. So called from Barèges, Frances, where originally made” (14).

²⁴ In their work *Victorian Heroines: Representations of Femininity in Nineteenth-century Literature and Art*, Kimberley Reynolds and Nicola Humble discuss Esther’s shawl in this moment and note, “It is not only the sordid and inadequate nature of her covering that marks Esther as a prostitute in this encounter: it is the gay colour of her shawl, and the delicate fabrics—gauze and muslin—which, utterly inadequate for any manual labour, were the preserve of the leisured classes” (57). Reynolds and Humble connect Esther’s shawl with economic and class positions rather than national ones, and see the fabrics of the shawl as unbecoming Esther’s previous life of manual labor.

²⁵ Sheila Blackburn tells us that Henry Mayhew’s attempt “to draw attention to the wretchedness of seamstresses” unearthed the fact that “many needlewomen, merely in order to exist, routinely supplemented their meager earnings with prostitution,” and a quote from this study inspires Blackburn’s title: “‘To be poor and to be honest, especially with young girls is the hardest struggle of all’” (245). The fact that “honest work” like needlework is insufficient to support one person let alone a family is highlighted throughout the work-reform literature of the time.

²⁶ In her article “All that Glitters is not Gold: the Show-Stop and the Victorian Seamstress,” Beth Harris argues that the figure of the seamstress, specifically “existed in a world which appealed to the eye in unprecedented ways because she sewed the dresses worn by upper-class and aspiring middle-class women [...]. In a construction that could be described almost entirely in terms of the gaze, the seamstress was consistently represented in this period as the virtuous and modest other of a vain and narcissistic femininity” (115-117). While Margaret, Mary’s seamstress friend, fulfills this image of the “virtuous and modest other,” Mary Barton complicates this either/or dichotomy by virtue of her vanity and the eventual triumph of her modesty.

²⁷ Here, because Ruth is sewing a repair on the dress, she can assume the title of “seamstress,” who Beth Harris tells us “refuses the gaze” and thus “guarantees her sincerity and virtue” (“All that Glitters” 127). Yet Ruth does not refuse the gaze completely; she glances up and Bellingham and then returns her gaze downwards. This quick half-gaze on Ruth’s behalf perhaps emulates her half-innocence on which Gaskell insists.

²⁸ In *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women*, Elizabeth Wilson argues that an urban life and the move to the city in the nineteenth century made women “more vulnerable to the ‘male gaze’” (27).

²⁹ Arthur Liberty, founder of Liberty & Co., and Charles Frederick Worth, establisher of the House of Worth fashion house, were both very influential men in nineteenth-century women's fashions. For further discussion of both men, please see Alison Adburgham's *Liberty's: A Biography of a Shop* and Elizabeth Ann Coleman's *The Opulent Era: Fashions of Worth, Doucet and Pingat*.

³⁰ John Harvey's study *Men in Black* examines men's dress and, particularly, the shift to black attire in the nineteenth century. Brent Shannon discusses men's fashion specifically during the Victorian period in his work *The Cut of His Coat: Men, Dress, and Consumer Culture in Britain, 1860-1914*. And Christopher Breward explores male consumerism in the nineteenth century in his work *The Hidden Consumer: Masculinities, Fashion and City Life 1860-1914*.

³¹ In *Fashion and Eroticism*, Valerie Steele does not argue for this heterosexist imperative, but does argue that "Because clothing is so intimately associated with the physical body, at the deepest level all clothing is erotic" (9). While she admits that this reduction of fashion to eroticism does have its problems (9-10), she does believe that clothing's distinction between male and female does make it erotically charged (25).

³² Sharon Marcus also argues that "Victorian women as well as men enjoyed objectifying women and entertained active, aggressive impulses towards femininity. Victorian commodity culture incited an erotic appetite for femininity in women, framed spectacular images of women for a female gaze, and prompted women's fantasies about dominating a woman or submitting to one" (112).

³³ *A Dictionary of Costume and Fashion* defines merino as "fine, soft dress fabric, resembling cashmere; originally made of the wool of merino sheep" (223).

³⁴ *A Dictionary of Costume and Fashion* defines drab as both a color that is "Dull, brownish-gray" and as a fabric that is a "Thick cloth of drab color. Used for rough outer garments, uniforms, etc. From French word *drap*, meaning cloth" (100).

³⁵ The narration informs us that John Barton chooses to apprentice his daughter to a dressmaker rather than allow her to go into factory work because of his experiences with his sister-in-law, Esther (25). Mary's opinions of a dressmaker's apprentice center on being "always dressed with a certain regard to appearance" that is dependent on the fact that she "must never soil her hands, and need never redden or dirty her face with hard labour" (26). Mary's abhorrence of dirt and dirty work is in Gaskell's work a signal that she longs for a life of luxury, one that Mr. Carson can offer her as his mistress.

³⁶ From "A Real Social Evil" by Harriet Martineau (33).

³⁷ In *Seeing Through Clothes*, Anne Hollander argues that George Eliot sees “that habits of dress are like habits of thought: they feel natural, even unnoticeable, but they affect the actual quality of personal life while they may themselves seem to be independently changing through history” (433).

³⁸ In her article “Inventing Reality: The Ideological Commitments of George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*,” Elizabeth Langland sees Dorothea’s attention to clothing and then her ultimate rejection of it in this scene to be “a mark of Dorothea’s innate nobility of spirit” that she is able to dismiss items of clothing like her bonnet and gloves so easily (93). Langland also sees several moments of the text as enacting “The dialectic of nature and artifice” as “an opposition to nobility and commonness,” in which “attention to clothing reveals one’s commonness” (93). Dorothea’s constant attention to clothing throughout the novel, however, belies this belief in “commonness.”

³⁹ In the Broadview edition of *Middlemarch*, the footnote to this passage on the “Henrietta-Maria style” states that Charles I’s queen often was painted wearing a similar style of necklace (38).

⁴⁰ Sally Shuttleworth argues that *Middlemarch* is a novel “fascinated by bodies, and their role in social culture” (425).

⁴¹ Jean Arnold’s article “Cameo Appearances: The Discourse of Jewelry in *Middlemarch*” offers a thorough and fascinating critique of the use and language of jewelry not only in Eliot’s novel but also in the Victorian age at large. She argues that despite Dorothea’s understanding of the jewels as symbols of a political or economic system that counters her aesthetic values, she retains the jewelry because “she will consistently embrace belief systems grounded in aesthetic values” (267). Arnold also sees some jewelry as having “imperial power” in the Victorian age (268).

⁴² Clair Hughes sees “Dorothea’s delight in the gems” as suggesting “an aesthetic need, and a half-conscious sense of how they might enhance her looks” (93). I argue instead that there is little that is “half-conscious” about Dorothea’s understanding of how to figure her body and beauty best.

⁴³ Fred Davis understands antifashion as “usually viewed by those in authority in these [“strongly authoritarian or totalitarian”] societies (as well as by a populace perhaps in sympathy with its manifestation) as a form of political protest. It is thereby automatically rendered suspect” (165-66). While the society of *Middlemarch* is neither “strongly authoritarian or totalitarian,” it still views Dorothea’s fashionable choices as different.

⁴⁴ Hughes understands Dorothea’s plain dress, particularly her plain sleeves, as “conspicuously different, an intentional difference, perhaps, to Aesthetic or ‘reformed’

dress of Eliot's own time. Dorothea's image is neither in nor out of fashion: acceptable to a reader of 1871, it is also comparable to a timeless Bible verse or poem set gravely amid the day's trivia" (93).

⁴⁵ In his work on men's clothing *Men in Black*, John Harvey acknowledges that "in the novels by women, writing on women's dress, that the best light is shed on the real and serious importance of dress: as when, in *North and South*, the true nobility of Margaret Hale, both of her figure and of her spirit, is made visible by a particular dress, or as when Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch*, preparing for a difficult interview with the woman she believes to have seduced the man she loves, draws strength from the attention she gives to her toilet [...]. The world of dress, and of talk about dress, is, in the nineteenth century especially, a woman's world" (197). Harvey uses this understanding of the importance of dress in women's lives to highlight the supposed femininity in importance of dress in men's lives.

⁴⁶ Andrew H. Miller argues that at the same time "Eliot conventionally genders domestic concerns, linking material culture with mood, habit and women" she is "clearly devaluing feminine material culture—it opposes 'responsible' reason. Her discomfort with material culture arises from the ability, associated with the feminine, to operate beneath the notice of reason" (*Novels Behind Glass* 192). Miller sees Dorothea's fashionable choices as disdainful of feminine interest in dress (192), despite the fact that Dorothea truly enjoys and appreciates clothing.

⁴⁷ Hughes concludes her statement by noting that it is "playacting mitigated, however, by a desire to submit to some ideal task or person, and inspired by idealism, by 'all that is fine'" (94).

⁴⁸ Suzanne Keen argues that Quakerish dress in novels like *Middlemarch* and *Jane Eyre* is actually erotically charged and not as Puritan as standard readings might attest (227).

⁴⁹ Lydgate falls into debt partly because of Rosamond's desires for pretty things, but also partly because he does not understand money or the amount he himself spends on clothing and items of the house. The text notes that "Lydgate believed himself to be careless about his dress, and he despised a man who calculated the effects of his costume; it seemed to him only a matter of course that he had abundance of fresh garments—such things were naturally ordered in sheaves. It must be remembered that he had never hitherto felt the check of importunate debt, and he walked by habit, not by self-criticism. But the check had come" (466).

⁵⁰ Hughes argues that right before writing *Middlemarch*, Eliot was chastised by Owen Jones for her inattention to personal dress, and that this might have influenced her attention to clothing in the novel (91).

CHAPTER V

WOMEN WHO DID: THE NEW WOMAN, DRESS REFORM, AND THE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

The author of the 1859 anonymous tract *Dress: A Few Words on Fashion and Her Idols* preaches against the heady and seductive sway fashion holds over Englishwomen and the author's conclusion utilizes the nationalist rhetoric so often seen in discussions of fashion. Like his or her fellow authors on the subject of dress, this author compares Englishwomen to Frenchwomen and finds the latter wanting (36-37). *Dress* suggests that the decline of England is in no small part due to the decline in womanhood, especially as seen through the frivolousness and extravagance of women's dress (6), and its author calls for a true dress "reform":

In these days, when Reform is on every lip, [...] let the women of England set a noble example to her legislators, and seize the substance while they lose even the shadow.

Let them carry it into their homes, and make it the principle of their actions. Let them break from the shackles of the arch tyrant *Fashion*, and claim for themselves universal suffrage on the subject of flounces and petticoats. (35-36, emphasis original)

The author understands that women will not benefit from the Reform fever sweeping the nation, but although women "lose even the shadow," the author urges them to take to heart the "substance" or intention of Reform. With this conclusion, the author of *Dress* appeals to female readers with the political language of Reform, legislation, and suffrage

most commonly associated with men because of their legal rights of citizenship; using it in a tract that due to its subject matter would be intended for a largely female audience, the author must assume that women have an interest in politics, as well, a small grasp at that “shadow” they as a whole lose. By referencing the Reform fervor sweeping the English nation and by calling for “universal suffrage” over “flounces and petticoats,” the author playfully places women’s fashion in the more public arena of national change and conflates the political and personal by conflating Reform and fashion.

But by asking women to “claim for themselves universal suffrage on the subject of flounces and petticoats,” the author of *Dress* asks women to take charge of not only their own dress and clothing, but also their role in the fashionable world. He or she wants all women to have a say in fashion, thus making fashion more democratic. Calling for “universal suffrage” implies a sense of control over the nuances of dress dictated by the “arch tyrant *Fashion*,” and wrestles that control away from the nebulous sentient being so many writers try to make fashion out to be. In this, then, women do have some semblance of authority and control. Yet while this tract’s use of legislative language in a discussion of fashion is both playful and ironic, it is not unique; several fashion texts of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries employ similar language to discuss actual dress reform movements as well. In another anonymous 1859 tract entitled *Why Do the Ladies of the Nineteenth Century Dress As They Do?* the author calls for a social “dress reform” in which he or she demands that “the ladies of England really and faithfully pass this Reform Bill with its three simple requirements” (34) of altering personal style, of spending less time on dress (32), and of spending less time

talking about dress (33). The tract concludes with a plea to the “Women of England!” to “LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD IN THIS MATTER. You have a right to speak. It most nearly and dearly concerns you. Remember that silence gives consent, and in this case it may bring consent” (39, emphasis original). The author equates fashion with women’s audible voices, and sees fashion as an opportunity to express both personal and political ideology. Further, the reminder that silence “may bring consent” urges women to control those arenas they can; while the women of England may not have a clear and audible voice in government, they can articulate their political, national, and personal meanings through their dress. By calling for the “Women of England” to make their voices heard, the author gives women not an opportunity or privilege to speak but a “right to speak” on subjects that concern them. The term “Englishwomen” implies a counterpart, the “Englishmen,” who have the privilege of citizenship and the nation to support their voices; the women of England, then, as well as the men, have legitimate concerns that must be vocalized to both a government and a society that must listen.

Discussions of fashion and politics such as the ones in these mid-nineteenth-century texts pave the way for later discussions of fashion and politics as fashion itself becomes overtly political towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Women’s Suffragists (members of the NUWSS, the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies) and Suffragettes (members of the WSPU, the Women’s Social and Political Union)¹ recognized the usefulness of fashion in conveying a woman’s voice and often identified themselves as activists for the vote by wearing specifically chosen, easily recognizable uniform colors that spoke of the movement they

supported. They also shopped at designated, marketed, and recognized “Suffragette-friendly” stores,² wrote fashion columns alongside their peaceful and militant action journalism, and often were involved in domestic early-feminist politics surrounding the “New Woman” and dress reform debates. This uniformity often was coupled with their conscious feminization of their appearance, and many women’s rights activists, in order to fight more successfully for the vote, domesticated themselves to the ideals of late Victorian womanhood³ in order to disassociate themselves from the militant tactics used by groups such as the WSPU. In her article “Fashion, Femininity and the Fight for the Vote,” Katrina Rolley reminds us that “garments and details of appearance were used to signal deviation from or adherence to the feminine ideal” (51). When the Suffragettes used fashion, they attempted to look as much like the Victorian and Edwardian ideal of womanhood as possible in order to adhere to standards of femininity. Many Suffragists and Suffragettes concluded that the most moderate means of achieving their goals of the vote and of popular support was to dress carefully, fashionably, and well.

As is now well documented, the Suffragettes’ and Suffragists’ campaigns relied heavily on spectacle to bring attention to their cause and, in the end, achieve women’s suffrage. Militant and non-militant alike, women’s rights activists participated in parades and demonstrations publicly and dressed fashionably privately in order to further their cause. Much has been written on the “purple, white, and green” color uniformity campaign of the WSPU; critics such as Lisa Tickner, Diane Atkinson, and Katrina Rolley extensively discuss the spectacle of color and the uniformity of dress of the Suffragettes. But while discussions of the color campaigns are plentiful, few scholars

have examined the impact of national dress on the suffrage movement. For these large-scale parades, demonstrations, and spectacles, some Suffragettes would wear the national dress unique to their countries of birth. For the British Suffragettes, England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland were represented in national costume, and even women from countries in the British Empire like India would participate in the demonstrations. These activists used national dress to represent the political voice that the women of Britain did not have; by wearing the specific and recognizable national dress of their countries, these women demonstrated that they, too, occupied an important place in the construction and continuation of nationhood that was equal to the place of their male contemporaries.

The suffrage movement and early-feminist politics often existed hand in hand with the dress reform movement and the conceptualization of the New Woman that appears at the end of the nineteenth century. As advertising and the popular press become more dependent on visual reproductions of drawings, paintings, editorial cartoons, and photography at the end of the nineteenth century, images of the changing Victorian woman proliferate and, in many cases, become exaggerated. The attention paid to the New Woman in both the media and in literature varies from earnest to satiric to objective, and almost all attention depends on her image. Grant Allen's 1895 novel *The Woman Who Did* and H. G. Wells' 1909 novel *Ann Veronica* both are texts concerned with the New Woman and the Suffragette's plight, and present heroines who, like their real-life feminist contemporaries, dress fashionably, carefully, and well. By looking specifically at a so-called "woman's concern" like fashion, these male-authored

novels present a sympathetic view of the social and political difficulties faced by the late-nineteenth-century woman who is interested in change.⁴ These novels echo the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century woman's use of fashion as a political arena in and of itself; whether in the fight for the vote, for women's rights, or for dress reform, Victorian feminists reclaim the feminine stereotype and utilize it as a means of political and social communication. As Suffragists and Suffragettes use specific colors and clothing to vocalize their concerns and beliefs, fashion and politics both are written on and displayed by female bodies. And as women use trappings of nation and empire to stand in for the political voice they do not have, they express their agreement with the notion that fashion is a feminine concern, insofar as fashion can be used as a tool of political discontent. Through discussions of Suffrage politics and fashionable campaigns such as the "purple, white, and green," the use of national dress to show gender imbalance in the nation, and the popular discussion of dress reform and New Women politics, this chapter argues that these feminists demonstrated clearly their rights to an equal role in nationhood and citizenry heretofore occupied by men in a society and nation that as of yet largely refused them a voice, or a vote. These feminists used speech and writing as well as fashion to communicate national and gender issues and concerns; in the hands of the Suffragettes and their ilk, fashion becomes an important and viable means of transmitting personal and political information, and of transmitting their argument for their rightful place in the larger national landscape.

“Strength and Honour Are Her Clothing”⁵: Suffrage, Nationalism, and Fashion

At the core of the women’s suffrage movement in the nineteenth century lies this contradiction: in a nation ruled by a female monarch, women were refused the right to vote. It is no wonder, then, that many pieces of propaganda set forth by the various suffrage societies are adorned with images of Queen and Country. The cover for the “Women’s Suffrage Calendar for 1899” displays a sketch of Queen Victoria surrounded by the words “STRENGTH AND HONOUR ARE HER CLOTHING” [Figure A-1].⁶

The image of the Queen is a familiar one: Victoria is in profile, wearing the crown that marks her status as a monarch, and the mourning veil that marks her status as a grieving widow. But while her position as Queen of England and Empress of India is signaled by her crown, so, too, is her femininity signaled through accoutrements, shown in that mourning veil and in the detailing of jewels around her neck and in her ears. In this cover, “strength and honour” are synonymous with her clothing, and as a Queen, her material clothing could be very stylish indeed. But the converse is true, as well; while she has access to stylish clothing as Queen, Victoria does not need them because she has “strength and honour” to clothe her. This is a conundrum faced by those nineteenth-century women fighting for women’s suffrage; the need for fashion to represent femininity is highlighted by the desire to reject fashion, often configured as a superficial, feminine concern, in order to represent “strength and honour” among women.

This image of Queen Victoria thus signals to modern viewers the intense struggle nineteenth-century feminists endured in their fight for the vote and their desire to gain a fair and equal role as true citizens of their nation. The crown and mourning veil

highlighted in this sketch of Queen Victoria are representative of the two concerns of the women who fought for the right to vote. The crown is even further complicated by its placement on the monarch's head: unworn, it is a symbol of nation, but worn by Victoria, it becomes *the* symbol of nation as it assumes its rightful place on the body of the monarch. The body of the monarch, configured as the physical embodiment of nation, is in this instance more than symbolic; it is the vessel through which symbolism can occur. The mourning veil, in contrast, is a symbol not only of femininity but also of fashionable femininity. The Victorian era made formal public mourning a long and arduous process physically symbolized through clothing. Not only did the color black signal mourning, but the specific fabrics worn according to the depths of grief and relationship to the deceased did as well. A widow, for example, would obey the strictest rules in mourning dress, and also would be watched carefully to ensure her adherence to the social strictures of mourning customs. In images of Victoria such as this one, the separation of the two ideals she represents, nation and femininity, is important to an argument for women's suffrage, but so is the marriage of the two ideals, embodied not only in one person, but in the person who is the highest-ranking woman in England and, at that time, the world. While this struggle was a political one as it fought for women's right to vote on issues in government that concerned them specifically, it was a national one, as well, as it fought for women's equal role in a nation that moved beyond symbolic representation. The fight for women's suffrage was not just a fight for women's right to vote; it was also a fight for women's right to fully represent and embody the characteristics of its people on which England prided itself and believed only half of its

population, its men, embodied. This dual struggle is best illustrated by Queen Victoria's clothing of "strength and honour."

Much ink has been spilt in discussion of fashion, dress, and the women fighting for women's suffrage, and discussions of the nineteenth-century women's suffrage movement explore the threads that connect and intersect fashion and dress with politics. The now-familiar "purple, white, and green," the uniformity color campaign propagated by the Women's Social and Political Union, is only one small part of the complicated relationship some of these feminists had with the more public presentation of their cause. Critics such as Diane Atkinson, Barbara Green, Caroline Howlett, Katrina Rolley, and Lisa Tickner, among others, have discussed the spectacle of women's suffrage and its important role in the fight for the vote.⁷ These discussions, on the whole, tend to argue for three main connections between Suffragettes and Suffragists and fashion: the presentation of femininity at demonstrations and in daily lives, the uniformity of display at demonstrations and parades, and the open discussion of fashion in Suffrage literature like *Votes for Women*. Few focus on connections of fashion and dress to national rather than political ideologies, and thus to representation rather than enfranchisement. Instead, these critics emphasize the massive campaign launched to bring attention to the lack of political voice for women, particularly monied, landed, middle-class women, that involved not only the parades, demonstrations, and hunger marches we most commonly associate with the suffrage movement, but also the benefits and detriments of fashion and its relation to the cause. As women's clothing becomes an important part of spectacle, it becomes an extension of the voice denied to them politically. I expand their

arguments to demonstrate how these fashions were used to convey national allegiance to England, even despite the political voice these women did not have.

In the image of “A LANCASHIRE LASS IN CLOGS & SHAWL BEING ‘ESCORTED’ THROUGH PALACE YARD” [Figure A-2], two suggestions stand out above all others: the woman’s youth, and the violence perpetrated against her.⁸ Her torn skirt, disheveled hair, screaming mouth, and resisting body are contrasted with the almost-identical policemen escorting her away from a scene that we cannot see and that is not identified except through the written description beneath the photograph. The use of quotation marks around the word “escorted” gives an obvious but important sarcastic tone to the postcard, and the necessity of that sarcasm is supported by the grip the policemen have on the Lass, the sheer size of the policemen in comparison to her, and the visible evidence that she has been manhandled sometime during this process: her torn skirt. Although we cannot see what has happened to her prior to this photograph, we can assume there was some violent struggle that tore the Lass’s skirt. Many of those who fought for women’s suffrage were concerned with appearing too militant to the community at large since appearing too militant often translated directly into appearing unfeminine. Caroline Howlett reminds us that despite efforts to appear conventionally feminine and therefore non-threatening, “it seems that once engaged in militancy, even non-violent militancy, suffragettes ceased to be readable as feminine whatever they wore” (74). While both the Suffragettes and Suffragists paid particular attention to their clothing, strove to remain aware of the latest styles, and often wore white because of its connotations of innocence and purity,⁹ they still could not escape the fact that they were

invading a traditionally masculine space—the public sphere, the street, and the city—asking for a right traditionally masculine, and utilizing spectacular performances in order to achieve their goals¹⁰ as they attempted to associate uniformity,¹¹ instant recognition, and non-threatening presentation with the vote.¹² Using this particular image of the Lancashire Lass as propaganda in support of the suffrage movement helps to belie the militancy associated with the Suffragettes because the Lass has had violence done to her; she is not holding a hammer and breaking windows in protest but is being led away bodily.

At the same time images of violent, resisting women like the Lancashire Lass harmed the movement, they helped its cause, as well. The WSPU reproduced this particular image on postcards and sold it to support its cause financially. Dozens of other, similar images of women subject to bodily arrest or escort lent credence to the belief that, for the WSPU at least, the suffrage movement was concerned with both physical and legal issues, as the entire women's liberation movement was, as well. The Lancashire Lass's clothing even speaks to the sort of image the WSPU wished to put forth. Her simple blouse, shawl, and clogs identify her immediately as a mill worker from the north. In case the viewer was unaware of any significance the Lass's seemingly innocuous clothing might have, the text on the postcard happily supplies the information; she is "A Lancashire Lass in Clogs & Shawl," not just a mere "Lancashire Lass." More than her youth, the identification of her clothing in both image and text calls particular attention to the plight of women like her; she, this image suggests, suffers greatly for her lack of vote. Her torn skirt implies her vulnerability, and the two

policemen looming over her give every suggestion of the oppression of men over working women, and even of the sexual threat men may represent to working women. Her skirt is torn high, near her waist, and if she had not been wearing proper undergarments, a signal of her innocence and modesty, her abdomen and pubis may have been exposed. Her loose hair goes even further to mark the physical struggle Suffragettes endure to acquire the vote. But the most important signal is her ability to retain her own sense of modesty and national identity. Despite her torn skirt and despite the violence perpetrated against her, she has through all her struggles retained the shawl that marks her as an Englishwoman from Lancashire, that suggests her employment as a mill worker, and that highlights her understanding of the modesty and protection a shawl, even one not originating in Kashmir, can afford. Her clothing, identified regionally through the description accompanying the photograph, not only is English, but also is specific to the northern region of England associated with industry and manufacture. Lancashire was a large county that at the beginning of the twentieth century included Manchester; a Lancashire Lass, then, is similar to the Manchester factory girl we see in *Mary Barton* as discussed in Chapter IV. This identification evokes sympathy for the Lancashire Lass from all viewers, even those potentially hostile to the suffrage movement and to the more militant methods employed by the WSPU, not because she is a Suffragette, but because she is an Englishwoman.

Images that chronicle the physical effects the fight for women's suffrage could have on women were often used as a means of garnering sympathy for the cause, but most were images that depict forced feedings in prison, as the violent conclusion of

hunger strikes presents a passive image of women's violation rather than the overt struggle of Lancashire lasses at Suffragette rallies. But the call to nationalist unity is here best represented by the Lancashire Lass's clothing. Further, as Katrina Rolley reminds us, this image is successful because "The factory worker's age and class allowed this depiction—a middle-class woman in the same position would have been unthinkable. Significantly, too, she is wearing her practical working clothes—clogs, shawl, loose hair and no hat" (53). This depiction of an "undignified" Suffragette is allowable because of both her age and her class; she can be forgiven any unorthodox or militant methods of obtaining the vote because to some readers, she might not know any better. This image can be contrasted with a similar postcard that emphasizes an older woman who, according to her clothing, has the benefit of middle-class wealth and privilege. On "VOTES FOR WOMEN! THE PRICE WE PAY FOR DEMANDING OUR RIGHTS" [Figure A-3], another Suffragette is escorted away from the scene of protest by two policemen who are almost identical not only to each other but also to the two men leading away the Lancashire Lass.¹³ Like the Lancashire Lass, this woman is held bodily; also like her fellow Suffragette, her arms are spread in a classic martyred pose. The two images present women in restraint, held and escorted against their will by the very men who would vote to determine their legal rights. Here, however, the two images part ways. While the Lancashire Lass resists her arrest, her head turned sideways to speak directly to the policeman or to those watching just outside the frame, her mouth open in protest and her brows furrowed in anger, the Suffragette in the second postcard presents an image of dignity. She offers no resistance and her eyes are shut to

the scene before her. But what is most interesting about this postcard is the fashion detail it presents. Her clothes are neat and orderly, her hat squarely on her head, her furs rich and long, hanging to her knees. Her coat is well-fitted, her cuffs, even in the hands of the policemen, still neatly folded. She is a woman of some money, if not of great wealth, and the image of her dignity and her bodily arrest offer a fascinating complement to the Lancashire Lass. The postcards frame the two women almost identically, from the policemen on either side of them to the streetlamp in the background of the picture, and they offer counterarguments to the most common stereotypes of the militant Suffragette. These postcards argue that Suffragettes are victims of violence and male intolerance, and further, that Suffragettes are no different from other women of England,¹⁴ as demonstrated by their youth and their either national or fashionable clothing, which belie the common assumption that Suffragettes are mannish, militant women who abhor feminine clothing.¹⁵

Much has been written about the physical bodies of the militant Suffragettes; many of these women experienced the fight for their cause through hunger strikes, violence,¹⁶ imprisonment, and, in the case of Emily Davison, even death.¹⁷ As argued in Chapter IV, the intimate connection between clothing and bodies is for some audiences an inextricable one; the utility of clothing, even fashionable clothing, to cover the naked body is an ever-present reminder of the naked body itself. Therefore when advertisements for Suffrage demonstrations were printed on aprons and worn on women's bodies, there can be no distinction between the body and the cause that is represented on the body [Figure A-4].¹⁸ In this image, the words "VOTES FOR

WOMEN” are displayed prominently across the breasts, while the time and place for the demonstration are marked on the hips and skirts.¹⁹ Some clothing demonstrations were not advertisements for upcoming parades or marches, but rather were headlines for upcoming issues of *Votes for Women* [Figure A-5].²⁰ In both of these images, the women are dressed precisely to draw attention to themselves; therefore both their accessories and their clothing are appropriately feminine. They all wear hats and the fashionable leg-of-mutton sleeves popular in the early twentieth century, and even the Suffragette sashes seem to be worn as complimentary fashion accessories rather than political statements. Their attention to detail garners attention for them. In Figure A-5, the women all have hats dressed with sashes, flowers, and in the case of the third woman, a demure veil. Their blouses are neat and tidy, ruffled or emphasizing the leg-of-mutton sleeves, and for the fifth woman, adorned with a brooch. While many of the women wear the ribbons striped in what we can easily recognize as the common pattern of the WSPU, some wear more common fashionable accessories like scarves or ties. But all six of the women smile for the camera, even the first Suffragette whose hesitant smile and dropped head suggest to the viewer that she may, in fact, be blushing under the weight of the attention of the camera and the male observers behind her. The observing men even seem to pose for the camera; three of them are so in focus, they become part of the composition of the photograph.

Careful attention to dress went a long way in supporting the women’s movement; the clothing stereotypically associated with Suffragettes, whether mannish, odd dress or even prison uniforms distinguished the Suffragettes from the potentially hostile viewing

audience. Wearing fashionable clothing or even common everyday dress helped to erase any artificial distinctions between the Suffragettes and the women they wanted to reach. When Emmeline Pankhurst, founder of the WSPU, negotiated on behalf of imprisoned Suffragettes, she demanded that each arrested woman be accorded the same treatment as previous male political prisoners, including the right of the prisoner to wear her own clothing.²¹ This concession, small as it may seem, helped morale among the women imprisoned in Holloway, the prison now famous for incarcerating several Suffragettes. Suffragette Leonora Tyson, writing home to her sister, notes, “And the other day, when I was fetching water, a lady said—oh, thank you so much for your pretty dress! It is such a pleasure to see something pretty in this ugly place!” (Tyson “My Dearest Diana”).²² From her letter, there is no way of knowing whether the lady is another Suffragette, but even if she is not, Tyson has succeeded in forwarding the cause for women’s suffrage by offering a “pretty” presentation of herself, even in prison, by boosting the morale of a fellow inmate, and by still appearing feminine while incarcerated. Even in prison, some Suffragettes are careful not to lose the appearance of femininity.

While her pretty dress lifted the spirits of another inmate, it seems that wearing her own clothes did the same for Tyson. The familiarity of the garments, even the scent of them could possibly remind Tyson of home. Further, wearing her own clothes would help to lessen the fact that she was, in fact, incarcerated; her own clothes would continue to represent her fight for women’s suffrage in a prison in which all other inmates, those not arrested for suffrage protesting, would not be afforded the same courtesy or would

not be treated as a political prisoner. In the same letter, Tyson asks her sister for the following:

Please send me my white voile blouse (the old, old one) which is put away in a brown box under the mahogany table in the dormer room—and if possible, return the crepe blouse enclosed herewith. I cannot face the new pyjamas—so will you also send one of my old muslin nighties which are in a card-board box in the box room. (Tyson “My Dearest Diana”)

Clothing requests of family members written from prison are not uncommon, in part thanks to the negotiations perpetrated by Mrs. Pankhurst. Suffragettes would send home their soiled linen for laundering, and request specific articles of clothing in return.²³

Requests such as these reiterate the importance of personal clothing to these women, as well as their desire for familiar, comfortable items. While not as fashionable or as pretty because of its age, the “white voile blouse (the old, old one)” offers an image of comfort—a familiar item from home—and an image of practicality—in prison, it is far more desirable to lose or soil an old blouse than a new one. Here, the Suffragette is not fashion-forward or prettily put together; she is a practical woman and her casual comfort wear is familiar and rational. There is also another practical reason: as voile and muslin are made primarily of cotton, they would be cooler and would breathe more than a silk crepe, and also, would be easier to clean.²⁴

It is this comfort and familiarity that the Suffragettes rely on as a visual signal of their cause. For the Suffragettes, being seen in their own clothes rather than uniforms while in prison presents an image of femininity to the public watching the exercises in

the prison yard or watching the Suffragettes exit prison once their sentences have been served. The association of women's characters and femininity with their clothing is a topic well-discussed in the nineteenth century, and the Suffragettes manipulate that association to their own ends. In her column "The World We Live In: On Frocks and Other Things" in the November 5, 1909 *Votes for Women*, Nita writes:

Opponents of the movement have almost universally represented the Suffragist as a dowd, caring nothing for dress, and having neither the wit nor the taste to be becoming. The caricature is on a level with that which suggests that woman finds a full field for her intellectual activity in choosing frocks. It would be nearer the truth, probably, to say that the Suffragist giving scope to her intellect is of all women the best fitted to express her own individuality in the clothes she wears. (87)

Nita argues that a woman with intellect best presents an outward display of her individuality through her clothing, and that an intellectual woman like the Suffragist is "the best fitted to express" herself through dress. Further, Nita argues that the caricature of the unfashionable Suffragist as a "dowd" who cares "nothing for dress" and, even if she did, has "neither the wit nor the taste to be becoming," is as ridiculous and as denigrating to women as the caricature that presents a woman who cares for nothing in the world but dress. By presenting these two stereotypes side by side, Nita highlights the hypocrisy that exists in common assumptions about women and clothing: caring too much for dress marks a woman as ignorant of politics, and caring about politics marks a woman as ignorant of dress. Also, by accentuating the differences between Suffragists

and non-Suffragist women, Nita in fact emphasizes their similarities; regardless of a woman's personal politics, she still suffers under the weight of social and political judgments regarding her intellect and her character.

Comparisons of Suffragettes and Suffragists to women not directly involved in the fight for women's suffrage rely on the commonality between them in order to present the Suffragettes, and thus their cause, in the best possible light. Therefore it is not surprising that comparisons of Englishwomen to women of other nations follow the same lines of nationalist rhetoric that other fashionable discourse does throughout the nineteenth century. As is typical of such comparisons, Englishwomen are described as more beautiful, more discreet, and more tasteful than their French counterparts. In an April 29, 1910 issue of *Votes for Women*, Nita offers in her column "The World We Live In" some "Practical Notes on Present Fashion" that argue for the shifting trends in fashion that offer more choice to the female consumer. Luckily, Nita argues, "London has not yet adopted some of the extremes which have been exhibited in Paris, the Englishwoman showing her customary discretion in selecting new ideas without lending herself to their exaggeration" (497). Like the writers of fashionable texts who employ nationalist rhetoric before her, Nita expresses the belief that Englishwomen are modest and moderate in their fashions; most importantly, however, she expresses this belief in the context of propaganda associated with and published by a militant suffrage group. While some of the viewing public may consider the methods and means of the militant Suffragettes also extreme or exaggerated, her call for moderation and restraint in a propagandistic newspaper attempts to disassociate the Suffragettes from such

considerations. By prefacing this comparison of Frenchwomen and Englishwomen with her use of the inclusive, unifying plural of the first person, “we,” she thus includes herself and all readers of *Votes for Women*, militant Suffragettes, in the designation Englishwomen.²⁵ This association with the Englishwoman is another means of folding the Suffragettes and their cause into the greater fabric of the nation; their cause and their methods should be legitimate because they are Englishwomen.

As the portrayal of the Suffragettes and Suffragists in fashionable clothing scripts their femininity and unity with women not part of the suffrage movement, the portrayal of the Suffragettes in traditional national garb embodies the nation on a synecdochical level. For large-scale events such as the June 17, 1911 Women’s Coronation Procession, Suffragettes from Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and India wore national dress unique to their country of origin in the British Empire [Figure A-6].²⁶ This recognized and accepted national dress worn to protests and demonstrations became a means of communicating women’s rightful place in the construction, maintenance, and promotion of nation. To have a national dress should be to have an important and viable role within the nation itself, as to be representative of the nation should be coupled with representation in the nation itself. Wearing their national clothing, these women argued that to be a good Englishwoman, or good Irish, Scottish, or Indian woman, was to be also a good British woman and a good British citizen, as for the purposes of protest, Britishness often was conflated with Englishness as in England for the English Suffragettes, the two became representative of the each other. Their protests and demonstrations argued that to be a good citizen of their nation, they must have equal access to the rights afforded to the

male citizens within that nation. This equality called for a broader role in nation and empire, beyond mere symbolic resonance. This move away from high fashions popular with a large portion of their middle-class contemporaries to national dress rarely worn but instantly recognized establishes commonality with their contemporaries on a symbolic level.²⁷ Like the image of Queen Victoria in which “strength and honour are her clothing,” the common images of the Suffragettes and Suffragists show a dual purpose: feminine fashions work in harmony with nationalist symbols, as women and nation are and should thus be considered as equally harmonious.

The Suffragettes’ use of the national dress unique to their country of origin showed what was present at the demonstrations, a nation’s women, but also, what was absent, a nation’s men. A nation usually has national dress for both men and women; for Suffragettes to protest in national dress without their male counterparts, then, was to argue against the hypocrisy and inequality evident in the construction and governance of the nation itself. While women were allowed to be symbolic representations of the nation, they only were allowed to be symbolic; they could not have the representation that an equal part in nation would allow. National dress supported women’s symbolic role in a nation, but because there is national dress for both men and women, the image of Suffragettes in national dress should call forth the image of both sexes, standing side by side, in complementary outfits. If men and women are meant to represent through their dress the symbolic resonances of nation, then they should have equal access to the practical aspects of nation such as the vote, as well. The Indian Suffragettes at the Coronation Procession wear traditional dress recognized as unique to their country of

origin; while foreign and exotic to an English audience, their saris are still British by imperial right. While there are men in the background of the picture who seem to be from various parts of the British Empire, none of them wear national dress common to any of the nations of the Empire. It does not matter whether the men are there in support of women's enfranchisement or out of curiosity about the procession; by virtue of their sex, they still are recognizable as national citizens. The women alone must rely on national garb to claim the same.

Further, the use of national dress in large-scale demonstrations such as the 1911 Women's Coronation Procession allowed for instant recognition of national origin. The Coronation demonstrates how often the Suffragettes used dress in general, and national dress, specifically, to promote their cause and offer immediate connection for the public. While perhaps not every person may understand the symbolic resonance of the "purple, white, and green" without Pethick Lawrence's written explanation, as in the program for the 1909 Women's Exhibition (13-14), most if not all members of the viewing audience would recognize Scottish, Irish, Welsh, Indian, and even English national dress without benefit of the program. This instant recognition, particularly as it is presented in large-scale demonstrations such as the Coronation, serves as a visual language with which to claim and to communicate citizenship. In the Empire Pageant of the Women's Coronation Procession, "The approach of the Car emblematical of the greatness and unity of the British Empire is heralded by the Union Jack," the program tells us, and followed by "women Pipers in highland dress" to represent Scotland (5).²⁸ Wales is represented by the Ladies' Royal Welsh Choir, "all dressed in picturesque national

costumes,” many of which were “old treasured costumes [...] sent from Wales” (5), while Ireland is “heralded by the green flag headed by Pipers in national dress” and “several women from Dublin, wearing ‘colleen bawn’ cloaks in emerald green” (5). The descriptive language in this program serves both as a helpful description of the processional order and as a reminder of the existence of national dress within the British Empire. The fact that the Welsh contingent wear “treasured costumes” specifically sent to them from their nation of origin and that the WSPU chose to include that information in the program itself is a gentle reminder of women’s participation in the building and construction of both their nations and the Empire at large prior to the suffrage movement.²⁹ Rather than presenting women asking for something they do not deserve, these demonstrations in national costumes present women asking for something they should, by consequence of birth, already have.

In an image dated 1909, four Suffragettes stand together in recognizable national dress. From left to right, the women are dressed to represent Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and England, the four countries in the United Kingdom [Figure A-7].³⁰ Dress alone makes the Scottish, Welsh, and Irish women immediately recognizable, even one hundred years later. The Scottish woman wears a tartan kilt, with knee-high stockings, a feathered bonnet, and a military-style jacket. Both the bonnet and kilt are instant signifiers of Scottishness, as is the Welsh woman’s hat an instant signifier of Welshness. The difference here, however, is that the Scottish dress is recognizable on both men and women, as the kilt is worn by both genders. Wearing the kilt as national dress, the Scottish Suffragette asserts the gender parity her clothing has but that she herself does

not. For the Welsh, however, the stovepipe-style hat is the article of clothing that is most recognized as symbolic of the nation, and it is unique to women.³¹ Wearing the stovepipe-style hat immediately designated the Suffragette as Welsh; wearing the stovepipe-style hat at the Coronation Procession protest immediately highlighted the further hypocrisy of gender inequality in her nation. While her garb is representative of her nation and, specifically, her nation's women, her nation still does not afford her the political representation of the vote. The Irish and the English women's dress, however, are perhaps more subtle indicators of nationality. If the Englishwoman's wide-brimmed bonnet, shirtwaist, and long black skirt do not mark her as English, then the Union Jack, slung over her shoulder, certainly does: only she has the privilege to wear the flag of Empire. The Union Jack also emphasizes the importance of England in the construction of Empire, and further highlights the conflation of Empire to Englishness, rather than the Britishness that would include nations outside of England. The Irishwoman, on the other hand, wears a provincial top, tied in the front, with an apron to denote her more rustic origins. But it is the shawl, knotted at her throat and thrown over her shoulders, that confirms her nationality. Most remarkable about this image is the fact that national identity is defined through dress, and it is defined positively. What the Suffragettes accomplish with their call for the spectacle of national dress is to remind their audience that even so-called "feminine weaknesses" such as clothing have positive and necessary places within the construction and maintenance of nation.

National dress placed the Suffragettes within the realm of recognizable British citizens; by wearing the dress visually and culturally associated with their nations of

origin, the Suffragettes became the “good” British women that writers such as Linton, Ellis, and later, even *Votes for Women* columnist Nita cry for. In truth, there is little discussion surrounding the suffrage movement that is not charged with nationalist intention, and we must consider the possibility that most of the Suffragettes’ and Suffragists’ attention to dress was put forth with the purpose of gaining the vote. The larger fight for women’s rights, however, encompasses issues other than women’s suffrage. Those issues, about the reform of women’s dress, about the freedom to move within public spaces, and about the redefinition of women in the popular media all utilize language and strategies similar to each other in order to vocalize the importance of and necessity for women’s active role in nation. Through overt public display like the spectacles orchestrated by the women’s suffrage societies, dress becomes socially recognizable as a means of political and national communication.

“Now She’s All Hats and Ideas”³²: The New Woman and the Public Response

In an 1894 article entitled “The New Woman,” Ouida denounces the feminists of her generation by describing in great detail an engraving of a Suffragette demanding the vote.³³ The description of the engraving does the Suffragette great disservice; she is pictured as unattractive, poorly dressed, and obese. Her movements are described both as ungraceful and defiant as Ouida paints this particular Suffragette in what is for Ouida the worst possible light. Ouida ends her description with a question:

Now, why cannot this orator learn to gesticulate and learn to dress,
instead of clamoring for a franchise? She violates in her own person

every law, alike of common-sense and artistic fitness, and yet comes forward as a fit and proper person to make laws for others. She is an exact representative of her sex. (156)

In this lengthy diatribe, Ouida willingly and emphatically takes an anti-suffrage and anti-New Woman position, and thus becomes representative of a large market of women who do not support the movement for the vote.³⁴ Ouida, like Eliza Lynn Linton before her, cannot see the benefit of women's enfranchisement or even women's larger access to the public sphere. Too, like Linton before her, Ouida characterizes the New Woman and the Suffragette by her outward appearance. The woman Ouida describes is "middle-aged and plain of feature" with "a waist of ludicrous dimensions in proportion to her portly person" (155). She wears "an inverted plate on her head tied on with strings under her double-chin," and her dress is exaggerated to emphasize her "balloon-sleeves" and "bodice tight to bursting" (155). The New Woman's fashion offends precisely because it is exaggerated; her "balloon-sleeves" and "bodice tight to bursting" are extremes of the leg-of-mutton sleeves and tight waists common for women's dress of the 1890s.

But the description of the woman's clothing that Ouida offers is not of clothing woefully backwards in fashion terms. In fact, the exaggerated sleeves, tight bodice, and small waist are instead the very ideals of fashion during the mid-1890s. Ouida dislikes the New Woman she describes not only for her exaggerations, but also for what those exaggerations suggest: the New Woman wears the height of fashion and is, in truth, new. Fashion's propensity for change is threatening to a more conservative public, and as Chapter III's discussions of Becky Sharp demonstrate, a fashionable woman is

threatening because she is a woman who changes constantly. The small waist “of ludicrous dimensions in proportion to her portly person” anticipates the Gibson Girl look popularized in early-twentieth-century America and influenced by the fashions of late-nineteenth-century England. The haute couture of 1894 in fact supports the image of the balloon-sleeved, tightly-corseted woman. Ouida’s fashionable concerns about the described woman are due more to her natural figure than to her refusal to “learn to dress.” The woman described by Ouida does in fact know how to dress, and she dresses well. The only fashion sin that she seems to commit is her alignment with the women’s movement, which at this time is considered by women such as Ouida to be highly unfashionable, and socially perilous at that. In her article “‘Nothing But Foolscap and Ink’: Inventing the New Woman,” Talia Schaffer also discusses the image Ouida uses and sees the image in contradiction to a similar image appearing in *Punch* ten years before. Schaffer notes that “Ouida reconfigures this image in different class terms. Whereas *Punch* depicts the orator in unattractively eccentric and male-inflected ‘rational dress’, Ouida gives her attire so fashionable as to be ludicrous. The small flat hat and the tightly cinched waist were popular 1890s styles. The balloon-sleeves which Ouida condemns were worn throughout the first half of the 1890s and got so large in the spring of 1894 as to become the object of *Punch*’s satire” (43-44). The danger of the New Woman that Ouida proposes, Schaffer argues, is that this character is “economically and socially powerful” (44). For Ouida, this fashion-forward woman is thus incapable of making decisions for others because she “violates in her own person every law, alike of common-sense and artistic fitness,” and, in the writer’s opinion, would better spend her

time refining her outward appearance, characterized by her gesticulations and her dress than “clamoring for a franchise.” By exaggerating her clothing, Ouida undercuts the threat not only of the woman’s words, but also, as Schaffer argues, of her economic and social power.

But the New Woman is not only threatening because of her economic and social power, but also because she is English and thus counters the English stereotype of demure womanhood. Because of the New Woman’s “clamoring,” Ouida identifies the feminist as a disruption to the development and peace of the English nation. She argues that “It can scarcely be disputed, I think, that in the English language there are conspicuous at the present moment two words which designate two unmitigated bores: The Workingman and the Woman” (153-54), and that the reiteration of the wants of the New Woman on “every page of literature written in the English language” only proves that the New Woman believes that on her cause “hangs the future of the world” (154).³⁵ Her careful attention to the “English language” as a site of discourse expands her argument beyond the English nation into the larger scope of the world, certainly, but it cements firmly the root of the language in England itself and thus defines the world narrowly as English. This woman is, for Ouida, England’s concern because she upsets a status quo of domesticity that for many defines the Englishness of Englishwomen. Ouida’s response to the Suffragette and New Woman is typical of those vehemently opposed to the vote for women. Her focus on the woman’s outward appearance and her intensely critical approach to the way a Suffragette looks as opposed to the way a Suffragette speaks is a common focus throughout the latter half of the nineteenth

century. *Punch*, for example, spends much of the fin de siècle satirizing the appearance of the New Woman and the New Woman's propensity for aesthetic dress, both of which became arenas ripe for mockery.³⁶ Even the New Woman's rejection of the more confining articles of fashion—like corsets—for their symbolic and literal confinement of women was mocked, despite the very real concerns some nineteenth-century medical professionals had over the corset's deforming effects.

Yet despite the fashionability of the outfit Ouida discusses, its exaggerated details of sleeve, waist, and hat become representative of the ostensibly unfashionable, feminist woman both in the fiction and the non-fiction of the end of the nineteenth century. Amy Levy's 1888 novel *The Romance of a Shop* predates the coining of the term "New Woman" by six years, but portrays characters who are in their lifestyle, politics, and fashion prototypes of the New Woman to come. In the novel, the Lorimer sisters attempt to support themselves through photography after their father's death. Yet despite their own forward-thinking ideas and politics, the Lorimer sisters cannot resist gently mocking the stereotypical "unsexed" New Woman. When a new tenant moves into their building, she is described as "an ex-Girtonian without a waist, who taught at the High School for girls hard-by" (160). The Lorimer sisters immediately identify the woman through two markers: her education, and her figure.³⁷ The narrator continues to describe the Girton Girl in much the same manner that Ouida describes her engraved woman:

The Lorimers chose to regard her as a usurper; and with the justice usually attributed to their sex, indulged in much sarcastic comment on her

appearance; on her round shoulders and swinging gait; on the green gown with balloon sleeves, and the sulphur-coloured handkerchief which she habitually wore. (161)

The attention paid not only to the Girton Girl's figure but also to her dress demonstrates that the sweeping stereotype of the New Woman depends on her physical appearance to carry the weight of the seemingly ridiculousness of her politics.³⁸ Despite the similar difficulties, trials, and tribulations that the Lorimer sisters themselves undergo in order to gain financial independence, they cannot see the ex-Girtonian neighbor as anything but a figure of ridicule. By noting her uncinched waist, the "balloon sleeves" of her dress, and the exaggerated color combination of green and sulfur, the text calls into question the validity of the Girton Girl and her priorities as a woman. This Girton Girl is not overtly fashionable like the woman Ouida caricatures six years after this novel is published, although they are, ultimately, characters from the same mold. Both are unfavorable portraits of women who fight for financial independence and enfranchisement, and both achieve the same goals of presenting the New Woman as either ultra-feminine or anti-feminine and thus unsexed.

Often described as woefully unfashionable and unattractive, this stereotypical New Woman, particularly the New Woman with an interest in dress reform, becomes representative of the unsexed woman. Joel H. Kaplan and Sheila Stowell argue that because being fashionable was closely aligned with being feminine, most Suffragists and Suffragettes avoided direct association with dress reform (155). The close association of dress reform with the New Woman and thus with common stereotypes of unsexed

women would make some Suffragists and Suffragettes fear the undercutting of their efforts to create a feminine appearance. Caricatures of the New Woman were used as ammunition against women's enfranchisement and were held up as examples of the ill effects of political discourse, education, and ideas on women. In Kaplan and Stowell's argument, then, the caricatures worked to some degree to undercut women's suffrage by dividing the various movements in which feminists were interested. In order to counter these caricatures propagated by detractors and the media, several non-caricature images of New Women appear in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century literature. These non-caricatures were forward thinking, independent, and political, but so, too, were they fashion-forward but not excessive, intelligent but not threatening, and most importantly, exemplary of the English paradigm of traditional womanhood. Several women in support of the New Woman worked like the Suffragettes to put forward a fashionable, traditional, and feminine image in order to best show allegiance to social and national standards of beauty for women. These alternatives to the caricatures of the New Woman are unthreatening to an England on the brink of reform and radical social change because they emphasize the more conservative and traditional womanhood cherished by their nation.

Exemplary of writers presenting this alternative New Woman, Levy unfavorably compares the ex-Girtonian to the proto-New Women presented in the novel, the Lorimer sisters. While one of the sisters falls prey to seduction and, eventually, death, the rest of the sisters at the end of the novel enjoy both husbands and careers. They fall between the two extremes caricatured in the 1880s and 1890s; neither anti-feminine nor ultra-

feminine, the Lorimer sisters are moderate, fashionable, successful women whose actions do not threaten their nation, despite their forward-thinking ideas. Their dresses are “becoming if not festive” (158), suggesting that they are still appropriately in mourning for their father. Also, their trials and struggles seem to affect their attention to ornament, and their dresses are as a result sober and “not festive.” The text also pays careful attention to their fashionability and argues that while their hairstyles are fashionable, they are “not cut into [the] ‘fringe’” (52) that was so popular with the girls of the period. Neither the extreme example of grotesque femininity Ouida references nor the extreme example of unsexed womanhood the ex-Girtonian represents, the Lorimer girls, then, are fashionable but muted, forward-thinking but not militant, and thus fit neatly into a paradigm of unthreatening womanhood.

As evidenced by the vast collection of reactions to the New Woman and her counterparts like the Girton Girl, the popular media of Victorian England had much to do with the construction, perpetuation, and denunciation of the New Woman. Patricia Marks argues that the emergence of the New Woman is inextricably connected with the advancements in dress forwarded by movements in rational dress and for dress reform. Marks notes that “freed from heavy, clinging skirts and constrictive whalebone undervests and wearing stout boots instead of slippers, the New Woman increased her physical movement both in and out of the home” (*Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers* 148). The notion that “physical movement” is increased “both in and out of the home” is of particular concern to the burgeoning feminist movement at the end of the Victorian era, and the freedom of movement allowed by fashion stylings that call for lighter skirts and

heavier boots anticipate the movement of women to a more urban environment and workforce.³⁹ The New Woman is thus characterized by ease and freedom, identifiers that cause her decriers to question her morality and her necessity to her nation.

Because of the wealth of writing both in support of and decrying the New Woman, it is almost impossible to determine a single unifying definition of the New Woman as the Victorians would have envisioned her. The image of the New Woman appears to represent a politically and socially independent woman who, more often than not, chose to abandon traditional gendered roles in favor of advancing her education, her political agenda, or her personal ambition. Modern critics, too, find defining the New Woman rather troubling and lay much of the blame at the feet of the burgeoning media market. Sally Ledger agrees that the New Woman “as a category was by no means stable” (10) because of the varying views on issues such as marriage and motherhood, and she claims that much of the controversy surrounding the New Woman was her association with “free love” (12).⁴⁰ Talia Schaffer points directly to the plethora of definitions of the New Woman existing in the 1890s, and argues that the “grotesque buffoon, whether bicycling in bloomers, ogling men, or thrusting her fist in the assembled faces of Parliament, was a media construct” (39). Ann Heilmann agrees with the views of the New Woman as “An emblem of the shifting and conflicting conceptualisations of gender and sexuality at the *fin de siècle*” who was “constructed” in varying degrees of femininity (19-20). This attention to the New Woman in the media relies heavily on the image she presents, and all three critics and several of their

contemporaries agree that dress, whether its reform, its language, its presentation, or its rejection, was instrumental in creating the public conception of the New Woman.⁴¹

Sarah Grand is often cited as first coining the term “the New Woman” in her essay “The New Aspect of the Woman Question” (1894), but it is in her essay “The New Woman and the Old” (1898) that she attempts to define the New Woman not through stereotype but through the similarities she has to the women who oppose her.⁴² Grand calls into question the “Gorgon set up by the snarly who impute to her the faults of both sexes by denying her the charm of either” (668) and instead defines the New Woman as the antithesis of the Old Woman, who has “no notion of progress” (669). This Old Woman, Grand argues, is “a creature of clothes, and she will adopt any ridiculous or indecent fashion that comes to her by way of the fashion papers; but she cannot be taught to dress herself” (673). Like Ouida before her, Grand envisions the anathema of womanhood to be someone who “cannot be taught to dress herself,” and someone who avoids rationality in the selection and presentation of clothing. Grand’s suggestion that the Old Woman “cannot be taught to dress herself” further implies the intellect and rationality the New Woman possesses; while her older counterpart is set in her ways, the New Woman can learn to be fashionable because she is intelligent, not because she is told to be so. This Old Woman cannot think for herself and thus blindly acquiesces to whatever fashions are presented to her by magazines. Grand sees this woman not as the vocal proponent for women’s enfranchisement, but rather as the vocal opponent of it.

Grand envisions this New Woman as fashionable, attractive, womanly, and intelligent, and creates a scenario in which a New Woman stops to ask the author directions. Grand describes her as

a young creature, slender, elegant, admirably built, her figure, set off to the best advantage by the new cycling costume, being evidently undeformed by compression of any kind. Judging by what the papers say of the effect of this costume on the female character, I really should have been afraid to accost her. (668)

Grand pokes gentle fun at the common stereotype of the ill effects the cycling costume would have on Victorian women. Cycling itself became synonymous with the New Woman, who was often characterized by the freedom of movement and liberation from enclosed carriages for transportation.⁴³ Further, because of the nature of the bicycle, riders must ride it astride, thus calling for a bifurcated skirt for women.⁴⁴ Trousers and divided skirts for women, controversial articles of clothing throughout the nineteenth century, become particular items of strife and symbols of the so-called loose morality and unsexed womanhood of the New Woman.⁴⁵ Grand counters these stereotypes by vocalizing the woman's desire to hurry home "to put my baby to bed, and get my husband's tea" (668). This woman, as Grand attempts to show, has not been unsexed by either her clothing or her politics; rather, she can support progress and embody traditional gender roles at the same time. Grand's New Woman, like Levy's Lorimer sisters, fulfills the requirements of the paradigm dominant for Englishwomen at this time; they are successful wives and mothers not despite of but because of their

individualism and careers. Not only does Grand's New Woman fulfill her role as a traditional mother by hurrying home "to put [her] baby to bed," she fulfills her role as a traditional wife, as well, in her rush to "get [her] husband's tea."

Many detractors of the New Woman and her movement toward women's enfranchisement, independence, and financial freedom saw dress reform and, in particular, the divided skirt, as symbolic of all that was unwomanly about the New Woman. Despite overwhelming evidence and careful literary constructions of the more gender-conservative New Woman like Grand's and Levy's, freedom of movement represented the worst of the New Woman to those eager to denounce her publicly, vocally, and often. The Bloomer, often recognized as one of the major symbols of the first-wave feminist movement, was an American invention and an American popular item of dress for reformers and early feminists.⁴⁶ Although the Bloomer did enter public and private discourse in London after its debut at the 1851 Great Exhibition, Karen Chase and Michael Levenson also remind us that "In the United States, the wearing of bloomers and the demands of an early feminism were securely linked" while in England "Bloomerism appeared merely as an astonishing affront to the proprieties of appearance" (126). But movements toward rational and aesthetic dress reforms like those against the tight lacing of corsets occupied a large portion of nineteenth-century England's discourse about fashion, and fashion writers such as Ada Ballin and Eliza Haweis call for a more rational approach to fashionable dress. In *Dress*, Margaret Oliphant discusses the Bloomer and its subsequent call for dress-reform, and asks "How is the dress of women to be improved?" (65). She argues against the belief that women are "at the

mercy of a milliner, or a society of milliners in Paris” (65-66) and instead determines that “A woman’s gown in its simplicity, fitting closely, but not too tightly to the body, and with long skirts falling to the feet [...] is in itself one of the most reasonable and beautiful dresses that can be imagined” (69). Oliphant calls for simplicity in dress reform, and sees the majority of women as rational beings who repudiate excessive fashions (70-71) and instead focus on comfort, attractiveness, and taste.

One of the most controversial New Woman novels, and perhaps the New Woman novel most familiar to modern readers, presents a female character who asserts her belief in women’s rationality in both her dress and her life. Grant Allen’s 1895 text *The Woman Who Did* presents the story of Herminia Barton, herself a Girton student and a feminist, who refuses to marry her lover and the father of her child on principle. Her belief that marriage is an institution that stifles women and forces upon them a dependence on men drives every one of her decisions, and eventually leads to the suicide engineered to free her child from the stigma of illegitimacy. Herminia’s dislike of marriage steers large portions of the plot, but so, too, do her other feminist beliefs and ideals. When Herminia first meets her eventual lover, Alan Merrick, she tells him, “Of course I’m a member of all the woman’s franchise leagues and everything of that sort” but that the vote itself is not her main cause for concern; rather, she tells him, “what I want is to see women made fit to use it” (59). Herminia argues for reform in the raising of women and the common social expectations for them; she believes that women should learn what to do with personal, social, and political independence before they have it. While she attended Girton, she left early because “if women are ever to be free, they

must first of all be independent. It is the dependence of women that has allowed men to make laws for them, socially and ethically” (59). Herminia fears that Girton perpetuates this dependence because her fellow classmates spoke only of “Herodotus, trigonometry, and the higher culture” (60) and nothing of any matter immediate or modern. While the female students were receiving a classical education at Girton, Herminia argues, they were not receiving a practical or useful one. Herminia’s vocalized beliefs signal her feminist qualities and alignment with the New Woman and the suffrage movement, and so do her clothes.

When Herminia first appears in the novel, she is wearing aesthetic dress popularized by dress reform movements and promoted by many New Woman advocates. The “curious oriental-looking navy-blue robe of some soft woollen [sic] stuff” “fell in natural folds and set off to the utmost the lissome grace of her rounded figure” (56). The softness of the fabric and the use of wool is a necessity suggested by medical professionals in favor of dress reform in that natural materials should be kept close to the body.⁴⁷ The fact that her dress is “oriental-looking” also signals the exoticism so popular among advocates of artistic dress; further the overall sense of naturalness that pervades the costume and suggests a lack of corsetry argues for Herminia’s belief in women’s reform on every level.⁴⁸ But the narration insists that the most important feature of Herminia’s dress is “the way it permitted the utmost liberty and variety of movement to the lithe limbs of its wearer” (56). The freedom afforded to Herminia because of her loose-fitting and comfortable clothing is essential to the novel’s portrait

of a New Woman, although contemporary audiences most likely would have read this freedom as egregious and one of the errors leading to Herminia's "fall."

The corset from which Herminia seems to be so free becomes to both contemporary and modern audiences a symbol of the oppressive mores of the Victorian fashion system. The crinoline, the hobble skirt, and the skirt train were all fashionable items that suffered under scrutiny for unhygienic propensities, but the corset was argued to be irreparably damaging to women's health and bodies. For the Victorian public, the long train on skirts popular in the 1880s may bring the dirt and filth of the streets into the Victorian home, but tight lacing of the corset could deform permanently a woman's ribcage.⁴⁹ Further, the sculpting and molding of flesh for which the corset allowed represented the more symbolic confinement of middle- and upper-class Victorian women, and many dress reformers took up the corset as the cause célèbre of their movement.⁵⁰ While following each new fashion trend was cause for writers such as Eliza Lynn Linton to question the quality of the women of England, dress reformers instead saw the continued use of the corset and, indeed, its apparent necessity to a woman's body physically and her morality symbolically to be detrimental to the women of the nation.⁵¹

To counter this stereotype and to promote the nobility of Herminia's actions and beliefs, *The Woman Who Did* couples Herminia's aesthetic dress and the suggestion of her freedom from the corset with nationalist rhetoric. Allen's insistence on Herminia's good and true Englishness is an attempt to garner the sympathy of a potentially hostile reading audience. While the first description of Herminia is dependent on the liberty her

dress affords her, the second description of her stresses her similarities to the common image of the good Englishwoman rather than her differences from the paragon.

She seemed even prettier than last night, in her simple white morning-dress, a mere ordinary English gown, without affectation of any sort, yet touched with some faint reminiscence of a flowing Greek chiton. Its half-classical drapery exactly suited the severe regularity of her pensive features and her graceful figure. (63)

Herminia's beauty is best displayed by "a mere ordinary English gown," classical in its Greek style, than the exotic Oriental robes she wore the night before, and Alan "thought as he looked at her he had never before seen anybody who appeared at all points so nearly to approach his ideal of womanhood" (63). In this early courtship scene, Alan's approval of Herminia is directly influenced by her clothing; she presents a beautiful composite image that calls forth "the ideal of womanhood." Alan, himself "only an Englishman" (74), thus appreciates simplicity and moderation in beauty; he prefers simple and ordinary fashions inspired by the Greek art so popular in Victorian England to the exoticism of "Oriental robes" popular among the aesthetes, but not necessarily the public at large.⁵² The fact that the "English gown" that Herminia wears is described as both "mere" and "ordinary" suggests that fashion highlights an Englishwoman's beauty rather than overwhelms. Further, if the "exotic Oriental robes" Herminia wore the previous night translate their exotic character to their wearer, then the "mere ordinary English gown" she wears that day would do the same: emphasize the text's belief that despite her politics, Herminia is no different from any other woman in England.

The use of English fashions to emphasize the Englishness of women in this novel is reminiscent of similar uses in novels by Elizabeth Gaskell and William Thackeray. But instead of deflecting concerns over the expanding British Empire or the intermarrying of French women and English men, Allen's novel uses English fashions to establish not only his heroine's nationality and thus commonality with the reading audience, but also his heroine's morality. As earlier discussions of *Vanity Fair* argue, Englishness in dress and beauty is defined most often through the lack of artifice, and the fact that Herminia "asked none of that long interval that most women require for the simplest matter of toilet" proves her naturalness when she returns in "the most modest of hats, set so artlessly on her head" (64). Even on their symbolic "wedding night," the moment of utter rejection of Victorian social mores in the novel, Herminia is described as wearing "a simple white gown, as pure and sweet as the soul it covered" (91). The novel thus manipulates not only the common association of clothing with nationality, but also the common association of clothing with morality. If the Englishness of Herminia's dress argues for Herminia's national familiarity, then the same Englishness in her clothing signals the social mores and beliefs Englishwomen are expected to embody. Further, if the looseness of Herminia's clothing could suggest a looseness of morals, so, too, could the simplicity and purity of her clothing suggest the simplicity and purity of self.⁵³

The Woman Who Did becomes representative of a larger genre of New Woman literature that expresses the very real desire of some late-nineteenth-century women for sexual freedom, and further, becomes symbolic of the outraged response to that desire

for sexual freedom. Novels written in outrage against Herminia Barton's decision to give birth to what she deems "the first free-born woman ever begotten in England" (158) include Victoria Crosse's *The Woman Who Didn't*, Lucas Cleeve's *The Woman Who Wouldn't*, and *Punch*'s parody, "The Woman Who Wouldn't Do." Even today, Allen's novel calls forth a wealth of criticism because it has remained in the forefront of New Woman scholarship, despite the fact that it is only a New Woman novel in subject matter; as a male author, Grant Allen is excluded from consideration as a New Woman writer by many critics.⁵⁴ *The Woman Who Did* is important, however, precisely because Grant Allen is a male writer, and his sex allowed him to approach the stereotypical "feminine arena" of fashion without having to assert his own femininity through his taste, or without having to justify an artificial feminine concern with fashion over politics. The emphasis he places on the Englishness of Herminia's fashions manipulates traditional fashion coding seen throughout this study and predominant throughout the Victorian era.

Another contemporary of Grant Allen, H. G. Wells, takes a similar approach to his feminist heroine, and sets forth a pattern of male authorship for the promotion and support of New Women and their politics. Wells's 1909 novel *Ann Veronica* presents a smart, stylish New Woman in the figure of the title character, and surrounds her with a wealth of references to contemporary discourse. Concern over the effects on women of reading novels, particularly novels like *The Woman Who Did*, over educational and financial freedom, and over the fight for women's suffrage all mark Wells's novel as a forward-thinking text that wishes to present a sympathetic view of the plight of the New

Woman.⁵⁵ Ann Veronica, a motherless young woman living at home with her father, longs for the freedom to attend the college of her choice, to study biology, and to have latchkey privileges. Over the course of the novel, she engages her own apartments, enrolls in university to study biology, protests the lack of vote, is arrested as a militant Suffragette, and eventually lives unmarried with the man she loves until he is free to divorce his first wife, marry Ann Veronica, and reconcile her with her long-estranged family. At the beginning of the novel, Ann wishes to go to a fancy-dress ball with some friends who are part of “a cheerful, irresponsible, shamelessly hard-up family in the key of faded green and flattened purple” (10). These friends, identified as Suffragettes by the “faded green and flattened purple,” have a modicum of influence over Ann Veronica’s thinking, but it is their freedom of movement that she most craves.⁵⁶ When her father repeatedly refuses to let her attend the fancy dress ball and ultimately locks her in her room to prevent her attendance, Ann Veronica leaves home. Part of the concern over Ann Veronica’s attendance at the ball seems to be concern over her costume. When her aunt, Miss Stanley, finally finds the courage to spy on her niece and discover the costume, she is horrified to discover an item of clothing whose “lower portion fell apart into two baggy crimson masses,” or rather, trousers (50). This costume embodies progressive fashions for the more conservative aunt who sees the trousers as symbolic of the freedom Ann Veronica craves. But the split legs of the trouser falling apart “into two baggy crimson masses” horrify the aunt because of the sexual freedom they symbolize, as well. In no small part, the Bloomer costume concerned the more conservative public because of the emphasis trousers would place on a woman’s hips

and pelvic region. The crimson color of Ann's trousers carries this concern to the utmost level by mirroring and exaggerating the color of the labia. The aunt's horror over the trousers is as much horror over their progressiveness as it is over their sexual implications. These trousers and this fancy dress costume as a whole are the reasons Ann Veronica leaves home; once she leaves home, she does engage in pre-marital sex, thus confirming the worst fears of her aunt.

Ann Veronica argues repeatedly with her father and with her aunt, who assumes the role of matriarch in this text, and while she has no small reservoir of freedom, she insists, to the point of flight, on more independence. As the fight over the fancy-dress ball rages between father and daughter, Ann Veronica tells him that she wants to be "a human being [... not to be] cooped up in one narrow little corner" (27). In response, her father reminds his daughter, "Did I stand in the way of your going to college? Have I ever prevented you going about at any reasonable hour? You've got a bicycle!" (27). At first glance, the text seems to argue against the continued developing freedom of the New Woman of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Ann Veronica seemingly has everything she has ever asked for: a promised collegiate education, privileges to come and go as she pleases, and even the emancipation of movement that comes with the ownership of a bicycle. She is unhappy with what she determines to be minute freedoms and eventually leaves home, indebts herself to an unmarried man, and is incarcerated in Canongate Prison for militant protesting. Yet the resolution of the novel, Ann Veronica's triumphant return to her family as both a wife and an expectant mother, argues instead that the New Woman can achieve her goals of independence and

still remain a valuable and important part of the English nation and the middle class.⁵⁷

Further, Wells's novel reduces the public to the private, and sees the activism of the New Woman as a concern both in the home and outside of it. While her father reminisces that his daughter used to be "all hair and legs," and "Now she's all hats and ideas," he does so "with an air of humour" (22), demonstrating that at the very least, pride in his daughter's accomplishments wars with his concerns over her independence. He immediately connects his daughter's fashions and her politics; his inability to distinguish between Ann Veronica's "hats" and her "ideas" directly references England's larger concerns conflating a woman's fashion and her political and national affiliations.

Throughout Wells's novel, the early feminists and New Women are overcome with both hats and ideas as the interconnection between fashion and politics is stressed. Wells uses the absurdity of some fashions and the acceptable modesty of others to present a heroine who would be both familiar and sympathetic to a potentially hostile audience. He, like Allen, presents his heroine in simple, modest clothing that is always clean and tidy to best present a simple, modest Englishwoman who is, despite her politics, always embodying the best ideals of her nation. The mannish militant Suffragette commonly caricatured does not escape ridicule in this text, but this figure remains carefully separate from Ann Veronica; rarely is Ann Veronica seen acting in a manner unbecoming a woman of her class, nation, or age. Through her radical friends the Widgetts, Ann Veronica meets a Suffragette named Miss Miniver who is "a slender lady of thirty or so" wearing "a dingy green dress" with "an ivory button, bearing the words 'Votes for Women'" on its lapel (30). When asked her opinion of woman's lot in

marriage, Miss Miniver says that she views it as little more than slavery (32).

Immediately, the more radical feminists in the novel are identified as shabby haridans who cannot financially afford to be fashionable because of their quest for independence, and who are hindered by the desire to express their political views on their bodies; her dress is both dingy and green, one-third of the common color campaign of the WSPU, and her lapel pin is a political button. Alone, the color green would be insignificant; coupled with the “Votes for Women” lapel pin, the color of Miss Miniver’s dress signals her political affiliations. When she gesticulates, not unlike Ouida’s caricature of a New Woman, she puts “out a rhetorical hand that showed a slash of finger through its glove” (34). Her clothing is both dirty and unkempt, two signals in Wells’s novel that identify unhappy and angry women.

Ann Veronica takes great pains to separate women like Miss Miniver from women like Ann Veronica, and throughout the novel, “dingy” and “dirty” dress signals more radical and excessively political women. The same dress also signals women who are socially excluded and exist outside the pale, for whose rights and reform many excessively political women fight. Ann Veronica’s sister Gwen, for example, who some years back had married an actor without the family’s permission, appears after her mother’s death “shockingly dingy in dusty mourning” (59). The prostitutes Ann Veronica passes as she walks through London looking for decent and affordable housing are “dressed in slatternly finery” (90) and each is “dingier than the last, dirty, you know, in grain” (104). Their “slatternly finery” recalls Acton’s descriptions of prostitutes half a century previous, and their physical positions on the street soil both them and their

clothes. The fact that it is not just slatternly dress but slatternly “finery” offers an interesting construction of these women’s background; either their clothing is purchased second or third hand, or their clothing is a sad reminder of previous lives. Unable to escape the streets or the soiling they bring, the women are “dirty, you know, in grain,” both in their skin and, symbolically, in their character. Later in the novel, when Ann Veronica meets up with Miss Miniver again, she finds her with “a wild light in her eye, and her straight hair was out demonstrating and suffragetting upon some independent notions of its own” (109). For Wells, a woman’s unkemptness and wildness directly correlates with her political anger; Miss Miniver’s “suffragetting” hair suggests that the Suffragette’s body is out of control. Unlike her real-life counterparts, Miss Miniver does not see the benefits of fashionable and neat dress; like her real-life counterparts, Miss Miniver is angry over her nation’s refusal to give women the vote.

In contrast, however, Ann Veronica “was never awkward, had steady eyes, and an almost invariable neatness and dignity in her clothes” (39). She, unlike Miss Miniver and the dingy prostitutes, respects herself enough to dress in “neatness and dignity” and has the family connections to do so justifiably. In spite of her feminist beliefs, she appears to others, particularly older, titled women like Lady Palsworthy, as “just as stiff and shy as a girl ought to be, Lady Palsworthy thought,” “free from nearly all the heavy aggressiveness, the overgrown, overblown quality, the egotism and want of consideration of the typical modern girl” (39). The constriction of the corset is, for Lady Palsworthy, necessary to the stiffness and shyness of a girl; constrained by a corset, a girl would not have the freedom of movement a lack of corset, or trousers, would bring.

Lady Palsworthy is “the widow of a knight who had won his spurs in the wholesale coal trade; she was of good seventeenth-century attorney blood, a country family, and distantly related to Aunt Molly’s deceased [fiancé]” (37). Her pedigree establishes her right and valued place in the English middle class, and her connection to Ann Veronica is, while not a blood relation, at least one by family association. Her respectability has been proven for generations. More importantly, however, her accepted position as the “social leader of Morningside Park” (37) here represents the middle-class female society that is by right of birth and economics Ann Veronica’s expected place. While Ann Veronica later throws this life over for independence in finance and love, it is the life to which she was born and from which she comes. Regardless of her later politics, Ann Veronica is firmly rooted in middle-class respectability. The text insists that Ann Veronica, as an active athlete and intelligent debater, is not at all the demure, inactive woman Lady Palsworthy assumes her to be, but it does agree that Ann’s figure is a graceful one, albeit “a natural one and not due to ably-chosen stays” (39). While Lady Palsworthy takes it “for granted [that] Ann Veronica wore stays,” she, in fact, does not (39), which belies the common assumption that a lack of corset automatically signals a lack of morality. Even without the confinement of a corset, Ann Veronica’s appearance is neat and tidy, her trim figure natural, and above all else, her presentation respectable English middle-class, accepted and approved by the highest-ranking society woman of her family’s acquaintance. Ann Veronica is thus determined a good Englishwoman by name, by association, and by appearance.

When Ann Veronica first leaves home and looks for lodging in London, she understands the dangers a single woman faces in the city, but further, she understands the dangers a single woman may represent to more reputable establishments. Luckily, however, Ann Veronica “was dressed as English girls do for town, without either coquetry or harshness, her collarless blouse confessed with a pretty neck, her eyes were bright and steady and her dark hair waves loosely and graciously over her ears” (80). This simple outfit, definitive of what “English girls do for town,” represents an ideal of womanhood to which Ann Veronica’s class, breeding, and father’s financial status allow her access. She knows enough to present a neat appearance and “[straighten] her hat” (81) before she attempts to gain lodging at a middle-class hotel; this neatness in appearance contrasts sharply with the dinginess and wildness of Suffragettes like Nettie Miniver.

It is only when Ann Veronica decides that she will participate in a militant protest and go to prison for the vote that her politics and her appearance coincide with Wells’s conception of the angry, unkempt Suffragette, and the novel and thus the author lose some sympathy for their heroine. As Ann Veronica is pulled away from the steps of Parliament, “Her hair got loose, her hat came over one eye and she had no arm free to replace it” (192). Her hair, too, is suffragetting, and its looseness calls forth the memory of Miss Miniver’s suffragetting hair at the beginning of the novel. Ann Veronica’s youth and prettiness work to garner the reader’s sympathy, however; her disheveled look is reminiscent of the Lancashire Lass, and as Ann Veronica is “clasped about the waist from behind and lifted from the ground” (192), she is no longer in control of her own

body and its movements. Once bodily handled by the police, she can no longer control her hair as it protests feminine beauty standards. In fact, Ann Veronica's entire experience of militant protest and arrest frees her body from her control, and that body is allowed to protest independently of Ann Veronica. While Wells exhibits some sympathy for his young heroine, this lack of bodily control suggests that her politics have overrun her common sense, and she has become comparable to the caricatures of the Suffragettes seen throughout the novel.

Because Holloway was full, Ann Veronica is remanded to Canongate, where "they dressed her in a dirty dress of coarse serge and a cap, and took away her own clothes. The dress came to her only too manifestly unwashed from its former wearer; even the under linen they gave her seemed unclean" (196). While the text understands that in prison, clothes would be unclean and potentially used, prior descriptions of Suffragettes in the novel, and particularly descriptions of Ann Veronica's change in appearance after protesting, argue that militant Suffragettes are dirty and unclean. A later declaration by Ann Veronica's aunt argues that while Suffragettes are "dreadful women," some of them are still "quite pretty and well dressed," a point Miss Stanley sees more as a catastrophe than a cause for comfort (209). In part, Miss Stanley's exclamation that the Suffragettes are "dreadful women" because they are "quite pretty and well dressed" is alarm over the incongruity they present. For Miss Stanley, the radical politics and militant actions of the Suffragettes are incompatible with the traditional and conservative femininity she herself embodies. For the Suffragettes, however, Miss Stanley's exclamation means that campaigns of fashionable dress called

for by the WSPU and NUWSS are succeeding in presenting a “pretty and well dressed” image, albeit not necessarily in garnering the support of other women, particularly those women who are older and more conservative. The complexity of this dual success and failure seems representative of Wells’ ambiguous position on the suffrage movement, as he is both supportive and critical of the cause and its methods.

While the presentation of some of the militant Suffragettes is so laughable as to be only deemed caricature, and while Ann Veronica’s trip to Canongate offers her nothing but dirt and degradation, the larger ideas of freedom—of education, of movement, of finance—are staunchly supported throughout the text. Kitty Brett, the leader of the Suffragette protest in which Ann Veronica takes part, is described as “very pink and healthy-looking, showing a great deal of white and rounded neck above her businesslike but altogether feminine blouse, and a good deal of plump, gesticulating forearm out of her short sleeve” (186). The similarities between this woman and the women Ouida and Amy Levy describe are multiple. The women’s girth and propensity for vast gesticulations suggest that they are stamped from the same mold. But instead of presenting Kitty Brett solely through exaggerations, Wells emphasizes her health through her “pink and healthy-looking” skin and her “plump” arms and her femininity through her “businesslike but altogether feminine blouse.” These two warring expectations for Kitty Brett, exaggeration and femininity, are confusing even for Ann Veronica. Her “first impression of Kitty Brett was that she was aggressive and disagreeable; her next that she was a person of amazing persuasive power” (186). While the text is unclear whether this persuasion is a good or bad trait for a woman of Kitty’s

politics as “she was about as capable of intelligent argument as a runaway steam-roller,” her “animated dark blue-grey eyes under her fine eyebrows, and dark-brown hair that rolled back simply and effectively from her broad low forehead” (186) offer the neat, put-together appearance that Ann Veronica presents. For Wells, then, sympathy for the suffrage movement and mockery for its more extreme measures exist naturally side by side. His agreement with the cause but not with its methods is best figured in Ann Veronica herself; she offers a more genteel and feminine presentation of a Suffragette as she triumphs at the end of the novel.

Like Allen’s before it, Wells’s text presents a woman who is both fashionable and English, and manages to garner sympathy from potentially hostile audiences for her and her actions. Further, Wells offers a text in which the men of the novel also seem somewhat sympathetic to the cause of women’s rights. Ann Veronica’s father accepts her back into his home after her complete rejection of the social expectations for a woman of her class. Mr. Ramage, despite being as close to a villain as the text has, confesses to being intrigued by the New Woman (63). And Ann Veronica’s eventual lover and husband, Mr. Capes, enjoys great debates over the Woman Question with his several female students. Even children seem sympathetic to women’s plight; as an older woman is arrested alongside Ann Veronica, “Her bonnet dropped off and was trampled into the gutter. A little Cockney recovered it, and made ridiculous attempts to get to her and replace it” (194). These “ridiculous attempts to get to her and replace it” present a hopeful image of the future successes of the suffrage movement. The “little Cockney” is a young child whose freedom to move on the streets suggests he is most likely a boy and

working-class. A female child would be a “Cockney girl” or a “Cockney lass,” and a female child, even one from a working-class family, would not have the freedom of movement that a male child would. The boy’s respect for the older Suffragette and his willingness to help her make the trampled bonnet a peace offering in direct contrast to the “dab of mud” someone throws at Ann Veronica (193). But *Ann Veronica* reminds us that despite the well-meaning intentions of any number of feminist men, there can be no freedom for women without a grand restructuring of the institutionalized sexism plaguing England against which the New Women and the Suffragettes fought.

This institutionalized sexism is best represented in Wells’s novel through the use of men’s and women’s clothing as symbolic representations of gender. Diana Crane reminds us that women’s restricted access to the public sphere correlates in no small part to their identification according to articles unique to women’s clothing, like referring to all women as “petticoats” (100). *Ann Veronica* takes the common stereotype of women’s identification as “skirts” or “petticoats” and uses it to challenge those same commonly held gender stereotypes. *Ann Veronica* asks Mr. Capes, “Have you ever tried to run and jump in petticoats, Mr. Capes? Well, think what it must be to live in them—soul and mind and body! It’s fun for a man to jest at our position” (176). Here, *Ann Veronica* uses stifling clothing to represent the larger stifling atmosphere surrounding the women of her time. The petticoat does not hinder her physical movement alone; like the corset, it becomes representative of the physical, emotional, and social imprisonment of women.

While in prison, Ann Veronica explores this argument further by composing a series of couplets that she addresses to her would-be lover, Capes, in which she identifies what she views to be the common symbol for feminine oppression: fashion. Her hallucinatory state prompts her to imagine Capes with her, and even causes her to envision him “in a policeman’s uniform and quite impassive” (198). Picturing Capes in a uniform symbolic not only of masculine legal power but also of the masculine brute force that carried her off to Canongate, Ann Veronica makes Capes symbolic of institutionalized masculine power. By virtue of his name, Capes is already reminiscent of fashion, and his position as personal protector and symbolic patriarch is here embodied in this poem. In her poem, she emphasizes the vast dichotomies between men’s and women’s fashions and between men’s and women’s standards of beauty, particularly highlighted by this uniformed image of Capes. Further, Ann Veronica pays particular attention to the language of clothes and ultimately, the freedom of movement and freedom of sexuality men’s fashions are privileged in possessing.

A man can kick, his skirts don’t tear;

A man scores always, everywhere.

His dress for no man lays a snare;

A man scores always, everywhere.

[.....]

For hats that fail and hats that flare;

Toppers their universal wear;

A man scores always, everywhere.

Men's waists are neither here nor there;
 A man scores always, everywhere.
 A man can manage, without hair;
 A man scores always, everywhere. (199)

While some critics have used this poem's simplistic rhyming structure and song-like quality to criticize Wells's commitment to Ann Veronica's feminism, criticism based solely on the poetry's simplistic quality dismisses too quickly the rather extraordinary critique of political change the poem represents.⁵⁸ By arguing for the differences between men and women predominantly through the language of clothing, this poem argues for the way in which women's fashion conveys personal and political messages. Because of the freedom of movement for which trousers allow, "A man can kick, his skirts don't tear"; in contrast to freedom of movement is the suggestion of the artifice of women's dress. It traps and binds not only women but also men; a woman's dress ensnares, but a man's dress "for no man lays a snare." Even the preposterousness of beauty standards for women are called into question, as "Men's waists are neither here nor there" and "A man can manage without hair." Given the propensity of hair to demonstrate and "suffragette" on the women in this novel, the implication is that a man can manage quite well, and perhaps succeed even more if he does not have the concerns that his hair will become unkempt and convey a negative social meaning to those viewing him. Even the repetition of "A man scores always, everywhere" suggests the freedom that men have to succeed in life, regardless of situation or circumstance.

At the greatly contested close of the novel, a pregnant Ann Veronica and her now-husband Mr. Capes are welcomed back into the fold of the Stanley family. In both ideals and in appearance, both characters have changed since the start of the novel. Capes' physical appearance has changed little "except for a new quality of smartness in the cut of his clothes" (283), but Ann Veronica's physical appearance is completely different, even to her height. She is "half an inch taller; her face was at once stronger and softer, her neck firmer and rounder, and her carriage definitely more womanly than it had been in the days of her rebellion" (282). Her dress is described in great detail and is quite possibly instrumental in regaining her father's regard (286). When Mr. Stanley asks to have a look at Ann Veronica, he "stand[s] up with a sudden geniality and rub[s] his hands together" (286). Her appearance evokes a physical response in her father, and the "sudden geniality" and act of rubbing "his hands together" is an almost sexual response. She has achieved approval from her father, here representative of a traditional proud English patriarch, and she has elicited a physical sensation from a man, here responsive with the tactile movement of rubbing his hands together. Ann Veronica responds by according him the respect she did not prior in the novel, as a father, and as a man. In response to his reaction, "Ann Veronica, who knew her dress became her, dropped a curtsy to her father's regard" (286). Gone, however, are the sly political insinuations and overtly political fashion statements that saturate the rest of the novel. Ann Veronica has challenged her nation's social and political restraints and she has not caused its destruction in the process. In fact, her challenges have restored her to England's ideal; as the two wayward lovers are welcomed back into the fold of

respectable middle-class society, they do so in contemporary fashionable clothes that convey the good taste that by virtue of the class to which they were born, they have naturally.

Ann Veronica's fall does not result in the "dingy" clothes so common to the other fallen or outrageous women in the text; rather she "was dressed in a simple evening gown of soft creamy silk, with a yoke of dark old embroidery that enhanced the gentle gravity of her style" (283). Like Herminia before her, Ann Veronica's designation as a pure and good woman is reiterated by her "simple" clothing and her serious nature. On the one hand, she has resumed the more conservative life assumed proper and traditional for her gender. On the other hand, the nation has not collapsed because of her so-called sexual indiscretion. She has triumphed in love and triumphed in self by returning, celebrated, to the family she "disgraced." Unlike Herminia, who commits suicide in order to return the world to its "rightful" place, Ann Veronica succeeds in living the majority of the life of which she dreamed, leaving possibility open for a return to science and her place in it. The New Woman's connection to both fashion and nationalism is argued most specifically through her struggle to define her place in a nation and society that wishes to contain her. Wells's and Allen's novels, along with various writings in support of the feminists of England in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, present an argument that a woman's freedom is not independent of her femininity, and that femininity, representative of the best of Englishwomen to England itself, is not independent of a woman's stronger presence in the workings of the nation. Herminia's and Ann Veronica's militant and non-militant actions are best

expressed through their larger connections to the realm of women's fashion and the struggle to redefine what femininity means.

Shop Window Symbolism: The 1912 Suffragette Attack on the West End

On March 1, 1912 at 5:45 p.m., members of the WSPU, who had organized in secret, launched bricks, hammers, and stones at dozens of shop windows in London's popular West End shopping district.⁵⁹ Both the time of day (the busy half an hour before the shops closed for the evening), and the places (several of the most popular shops and department stores, including Swan and Edgar's and Liberty's) were carefully chosen to best protest women's lack of vote.⁶⁰ The subsequent issue of *Votes for Women* quotes a press description of the event that focuses on the correlation between the militant Suffragettes and their supposed purpose in the West End: "Suddenly women who had a moment before appeared to be on peaceful shopping exhibitions produced from bags or muffs, hammers, stones and sticks, and began an attack upon the nearest windows" (352). The clear connection between women and "peaceful shopping exhibitions" is destroyed at the moment politics and fashion violently collide. These seemingly peaceful women retrieve their weapons from innocuous articles of shopping and clothing: their muffs, or their purses or shopping bags.⁶¹ Erika Rappaport notes that the gender and class of the women, demonstrated through their clothing, made it difficult for police to tell the difference between militant Suffragettes and their non-militant shopping counterparts (216). The attack against the fashionable shopping district and against the shop windows of popular stores, even stores heretofore considered Suffragette-friendly,

was thus considered an attack against the association of women with so-called trivial concerns like fashion.⁶²

What is striking about the attack on the shop windows of London's West End shopping district is not just the militant action engineered to call attention to the Suffragettes' cause but rather the personalized violence against the fashionable shops that the Suffragettes demonstrated. While the Suffragettes used the implications of good fashion to help add social respectability to their cause, this attack suggests the anger these women felt over having to appear fashionable, neat, and tidy in order to further their cause. This internalized anger seems to boil over at this moment as it is directed outward, at what the Suffragettes view to be the very symbol of both their freedom and their oppression. While fashion became an arena through which the Suffragettes used and manipulated traditional images and expectations for femininity, it also became a prison in which the Suffragettes must constantly exist. Fashion and dress were useful tools in the suffrage movement, but the constant criticisms over unfashionable Suffragettes forced them to utilize fashion all the time. Attacking the heart of commercialization and retail, the West End shopping district, and attacking it in the heart of its nation, London, the Suffragettes attacked all that the shopping district and the nation represented. Throughout the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, England figured its domestic strength and superiority through its modest and beautiful women, its successful manufacturing industry, and innovation. On March 1, 1912, the Suffragettes attacked the nation's conceptions of itself by attacking it en masse, disguised as "peaceful" shoppers.

In her unpublished autobiography, actress and Suffragette Kitty Marion⁶³ describes the actions of the 1912 attack as a moment of collusion and understanding between women. As she nears her “scene of action, the Silversmiths’ Association and Sainsbury’s,” a bit earlier than the intended time of attack, she “look[s] round for an encouraging, friendly fellow in the fray” (213). She finally finds “‘one of us’ a couple of shops ahead, gazing round furtively as I had done. Our eyes met in silent encouragement” (214). Arriving at the shops alone and still finding a friendly face and, later, more fellow Suffragettes in the crowd, Marion engages in a communal act with other women at the venues where the communal act of shopping takes place. Marion and her fellow Suffragettes appropriate an arena England stereotypically associated with women and vanity and associate it instead with women and militant protest. As the women relied on stereotypes of femininity and women’s approaches to the entire fashion system, they manipulated that fashion system to promote the voice that as of yet their nation denied them. They thus turned the destruction of institutions of fashion into vehicles of nationalist discontent.

Yet the fact that Suffragettes and Suffragists alike, New Women, dress reformers, and other feminists used and manipulated popular fashions lessens the immediate and convenient symbolism of such an attack. There is no doubt that the places of attack were chosen specifically for their symbolic resonance as palaces of consumerism most associated with women. So, too, is there no doubt that the busyness of the time of day and the specificity of the place, the most fashionable shopping district in London, ensured that the Suffragettes would earn record numbers of eyewitness

accounts and press reports. Later issues of *Votes for Women* still utilize department store monies to fund their publications; the March 15, 1912 issue, for example, presents advertisements for Whiteley's spring fashion show (380). While the issue of *Votes for Women* immediately following the West End attack does not list Whiteley's as one of the department stores damaged by the shop window attacks (353), it is nonetheless a department store representative of the large-scale shopping center against which the Suffragettes protested. Despite their anger against the dependence on fashion forced on them by the society they wish to support their cause, the Suffragettes were perhaps even angrier that they were financially dependent on the stores where they had to buy their fashions just to fund the printed vehicle of their cause. Suffragettes, Suffragists, and New Women activists remained committed to the spectacle of their struggle, and the vast use of images in the expanding field of the popular press ensured that visual imagery was essential in creating a unified and clearly articulated front for the cause of women's suffrage. The fight for the vote and for what the vote represents—women's freedom, independence, and solid position within the nation of England—concerned all of these women. Fashion and dress had viable and important roles in the maintenance of nation, the conveyance of femininity, and the transmission of those beliefs most important to late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century England. These women used fashion in order to best demonstrate their sincere belief that they could embody both their beliefs and England's, both freedom and femininity, both strength and honor, and that all of these are complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

Notes

¹ In *The Spectacle of Women*, Lisa Tickner notes that “The *Daily Mail* coined the term ‘suffragette’ to distinguish the militants from the constitutional suffragists, and it came into general currency in the months following its first appearance in print on 10 January 1906. The WSPU embraced it, despite the disparaging diminutive” (8). Throughout this chapter, these terms, “Suffragist” and “Suffragette” will be used separately to denote those who fought for women’s rights through peaceful means (the NUWSS), and those who fought for women’s rights with militant tactics (the WSPU), respectively.

² The October 6, 1911 issue of *Votes for Women*, for example, recommends three shops that display items relevant to the Cause in their windows (7).

³ While the use of fashion as adherence to feminine ideologies is important to this chapter and will be discussed later, it is not the foundation of my argument. Rather, the connection of fashion to the larger ideologies of nationalism that femininity suggests concerns my study.

⁴ Some critics might question this chapter’s focus on male-authored New Women novels, because, as Terri Doughty argues in her article, “Sarah Grand’s *The Beth Book: The New Woman and the Ideology of the Romance Ending*,” “The New Woman is a well-known figure from the 1890s, but only as male authors construct her. Most studies of New Woman fiction focus upon male writers, especially Hardy and Gissing; female writers, like Sarah Grand, Mona Caird, or ‘Iota,’ are ghettoized as ‘minor’ figures because their writing is not as experimental as that of their male counterparts” (185). Doughty’s argument that the more conservative writing styles of female New Women writers directly correlates with the more conservative subject matters of these writers’ novels. This chapter argues that male writers such as Allen and Wells are experimental in their presentation of their female characters in their overwhelming focus on the *nationality* of their New Woman characters’ clothing. This presentation of nationality is an effort to create a sympathetic feminist character. While female authors such as Mary Cholmondeley, Sarah Grand, and Amy Levy pay particular attention to the details of dress, their precarious social positions as feminists do not give them the same freedom as their male counterparts, and therefore their descriptions of dress demonstrate to some extent the same constraint.

⁵ From the “Women’s Suffrage Calendar for 1899.”

⁶ The calendar is in the Suffrage Archives at the Museum of London, in the Women’s Suffrage Collection, accession number 50.82/106.

⁷ For further reading, see, in particular, Katrina Rolley's "Fashion, Femininity and the Fight for the Vote," Caroline Howlett's "Femininity Slashed: Suffragette Militancy, Modernism and Gender," Barbara Green's "Advertising Feminism: Ornamental Bodies/Docile Bodies and the Discourse of Suffrage" and *Spectacular Confessions: Autobiography, Performative Activism, and the Sites of Suffrage 1905-1938*, Diane Atkinson's *The Purple, White, and Green: Suffragettes in London, 1906-1914*, and Lisa Tickner's *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907-14*. While these critics' work on the suffrage movement is important and essential studies of fashion and politics, my work is concerned with how fashion intersects with nationalism rather than politics alone.

⁸ From the Museum of London's Women's Suffrage Collection: Postcards, accession number 50.82/1722.

⁹ Katrina Rolley notes that white, "with its evocation of truth, purity, innocence and 'femininity,'" was chosen specifically to create such a sense in the protesting women (52).

¹⁰ In *Theatre and Fashion: Oscar Wilde and the Suffragettes*, Joel H. Kaplan and Sheila Stowell argue that early feminists had to demonstrate how they differed from both men and the stereotypes forced upon them, and thus "dressing fashionably became a political act" (153).

¹¹ Caroline Howlett argues that the WSPU's dress code never appeared in print because "Overt instructions to this effect [...] would have undermined the impression that suffragettes spontaneously dressed in a feminine way" (73).

¹² Katrina Rolley adds to this idea: "For women (and more particularly upper-class women) to invade male public space, invite the public gaze, become involved in violent confrontations with men, destroy property and be imprisoned should have been so 'unfeminine' as to be impossible. Such actions presented a fundamental challenge to dominant definitions of what women were and what they could do; given contemporary anxieties around 'definitions of femininity and women's place in public life', one would expect these issues to be contested within material surrounding the suffrage movement, as indeed they were" (50). She further argues that the Suffragettes tried to manipulate contemporary associations of fashion with femininity to their advantage.

¹³ From the Museum of London's Women's Suffrage Collection: Postcards, accession number NN22510.

¹⁴ Katrina Rolley cites anti-suffrage literature that describes these mannish, militant Suffragettes as the opposite of "true women, 'the women and mothers of

England’” (63), but focuses more on the image of the Suffragette rather than the national implications.

¹⁵ Wendy Parkins makes a similar argument in regards to the postcards of members in prison dress and of members “dressed elegantly in the latest Paris designs” (79). Offering postcards of women in prison dress, or in the act of arrest, as well as postcards of women in fashionable clothing, suggests that “Each image needs to be understood as deriving its meaning from its opposite; prison dress and Paris gown were two sides of the same coin, embodying different aspects of women’s political agency. The fact that both representations were big sellers at the time shows the proficiency of the WSPU in the construction of images for political purposes” (79).

¹⁶ In her article “Advertising Feminism: Ornamental Bodies/Docile Bodies and the Discourse of Suffrage,” Barbara Green informs us that cross-class dresser and Suffragette Lady Constance Lytton “records an attempt to trace her resistance on the body so that it cannot be erased: taking a needle, and then a hair pin, she begins to carve ‘Votes for Women’ into her chest and up onto her face. She is found by the prison wardresses before the message is finished (only the V is victoriously carved into her chest) but she does enough to reposition her ‘observed’ body into political discourse” (211). This very literal act of writing the movement upon the body goes far beyond merely using clothing to bodily stage the Cause. An interesting fact, however, remains. Instead of utilizing dress to convey her meaning, she uses the material objects necessary to create fashion and a fashionable ensemble to do so; a needle and a hair pin record her message on her body.

¹⁷ Emily Davison was a militant Suffragette who died in 1913 at the Derby by throwing herself in the way of the King’s horse. She was trampled to death (Howlett 80).

¹⁸ From the Museum of London’s Women’s Suffrage Collection, accession number 001203.

¹⁹ In her book *Selling Suffrage: Consumer Culture and Votes for Women*, Margaret Finnegan argues that “When women wore lapboards, sandwich boards, suffrage buttons, and even suffrage fashions the female body in public was a unique form of spectacle; it attracted notice and remained constantly susceptible for the controlling gaze of the flâneur/male voter” (63).

²⁰ From the Museum of London’s Women’s Suffrage Collection, accession number 50.82/1558.

²¹ From the Women’s Library “Hugh Franklin and Elsie Duval Papers” Collection, Folder 3: Miscellaneous Papers, 7HFD/A/3, Box #FL226.

²² From the Museum of London Suffragette Collection: Prison Letters, Police Summons, Prison Records, “Leonora Tyson letter collection from Holloway,” addressed “My Dearest Diana” on Sunday March 24, 1912 12:30 p.m.

²³ Suffragette Myra Sadd Brown even suggested to her husband that he bypass the prison surveillance system regulating correspondence by smuggling in a reply to her letter in the hem of the blue skirt she requested he send. From the Women’s Library Autograph Letter Collection: Militant Suffragettes, Index 1911-1912, No. 190, Box #6.1, 9/20/105, Box 4 vol. 10-22. The blue skirt she requests is from a letter dated March 16, 1912 and addressed “Dear Ernie.”

²⁴ Mary Brooks Picken’s *A Dictionary of Costume and Fashion, Historic and Modern*, itself a republication of *The Fashion Dictionary* originally published by Funk & Wagnall’s in 1957, is an indispensable resource for identifying specific fabrics.

²⁵ Even for those Scottish, Irish, and Welsh readers, “Englishwoman” includes them, as well, as the Empire and Britishness often conflate to Englishness throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

²⁶ From the Museum of London’s Suffrage Collection, accession number 001489.

²⁷ Elizabeth Wilson sees national costume to be a hybrid of peasant dress and fashion: “In many European countries the peasantry continued to dress distinctively. They often aspired to fashion, however, and what is now known as ‘national costume’ is in many cases a hybrid adaptation of peasant styles to symbolize a newly created national identity when the nineteenth-century nation states were formed. Some of the most seemingly ‘authentic’ of these costumes may therefore represent the rewriting of history, a kind of sartorial lie” (*Adorned in Dreams* 23). The focus on recreating authenticity is particularly interesting when examining the formation of nation states in nineteenth-century Europe, as the establishment of national identity is most dependent on spectacle.

²⁸ From the Museum of London’s archives, “Memento of Women’s Coronation Procession to Demand Votes for Women Order of March and Descriptive Programme,” 17 June 1911.

²⁹ Lisa Tickner argues that “Symbols must be recognisable if they are to be used in public discourse or they will not carry meaning. What matters is their legibility and not, for the purposes of communication, their ‘truth’. Once Welshness was associated with a certain costume, so that association was consolidated by its use in a new construction of ‘women-of-Britain’” (128). Tickner notes the legitimacy of the

association of symbolic costume; I, however, argue more for the role of national dress not only as symbolic spectacle but also as a logical counterpart to wearable articles of fashion.

³⁰ From the Museum of London's Women's Suffrage Collection, accession number 50.82/1307. Unfortunately, there are several copies of this picture in the Museum archives, and each has a different date and accession number. I use this particular image for clarity, and the date 1909 because of the date, "April 19, 1909," printed on one of the other copies of this image.

³¹ Colin McDowell's *Hats: Status, Style and Glamour* tells us that "throughout the eighteenth century, men and women in Wales wore round-crowned felt hats and it was not until the 1820s that a taller hat began to be worn. The hat now considered part of the national costume was largely the mid-nineteenth-century invention of Augusta Hall, later Lady Llanover, as part of her dual campaign to promote a national costume and encourage the tourist trade" (127). While its purpose was created for women by a woman, its heyday was brief, and thus became part of the traditional national costume.

³² From H. G. Wells's *Ann Veronica* (22).

³³ In her book *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle*, Sally Ledger reminds us that Ouida took the term "the New Woman" from Sarah Grand's essay "The New Aspect of the Woman Question," and thus made the term "now famous—and then infamous" (9).

³⁴ There is as much material written in support of women's suffrage as there is material written against it. "An Appeal Against Female Suffrage" published in the June 1889 edition of *Nineteenth Century* appeals both to nation and to reason against women's suffrage, and believe that women's "work for the State, and their responsibilities towards it, must always differ essentially from those of men" (25). For a concise collection of other articles both for and against women's suffrage, Carolyn Christensen Nelson's collection *Literature of the Women's Suffrage Campaign in England* is an excellent resource.

³⁵ This couples several reforms, and the working-man and the woman are interestingly linked in the figure of the Lancashire Lass, as she represents both the working class and women.

³⁶ In *The Way to Wear'em: 150 Years of Punch on Fashion*, Christina Walkley discusses several *Punch* images mocking the unbecoming nature of aesthetic fashion for most women (172-174).

³⁷ In the article ““Heaven defend me from political or highly-educated women!”: Packaging the New Woman for Mass Consumption,” Chris Willis notes that “A Girton education became the stock attribute of the intellectual New Woman of popular fiction. As the first women’s college, Girton was subject to considerable public interest” (55). He also reminds us that by calling her a “girl,” the popular press belittled her educational achievements, and that Herminia Barton, the main character in Grant Allen’s *The Woman Who Did*, is herself a Girton girl (55). We will return to Herminia further on in this chapter.

³⁸ In her article “The New Woman and the Crisis of Victorianism,” Sally Ledger reminds us that “The Girton Girl was much maligned and ridiculed throughout the period,” and cites a *Punch* image in which the Girton girl is “Severely dressed, wearing college ties, and smoking” while “the man of the house escapes to the servants’ hall for a cup of tea and a gossip” (26).

³⁹ Marks also argues that “rather than an expression of female frivolity, the New Woman’s dress was, for the most part, a representation of the ideas she stood for” (148). That dress would be characterized by the freedom of movement Marks mentions, but also by ease of care and of dressing, as many New Women would attempt to become financially independent and thus no longer reliant on servants to dress them and care for them.

⁴⁰ From Sally Ledger’s book, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle*.

⁴¹ There is, of course, more discourse surrounding the New Woman than will allow this chapter to do justice to her. For further discussion of the New Woman, please refer to critics Ann Ardis, Ann Heilmann, Sally Ledger, Patricia Marks, and Talia Schaffer, among others.

⁴² In “The New Aspect of the Woman Question,” Sarah Grand discusses the “Bawling Brotherhood,” her answer to the masculine decry of the “Shrieking Sisterhood,” and how most men are happier with either “the cow-woman,” a woman marked by domestic subservience, or “the scum-woman,” a woman who fulfills man’s worst fears of women (660). Grand calls instead for “the new woman” who is “a little above him, and he never even thought of looking up to where she has been sitting apart in silent contemplation all these years, thinking and thinking, until at least she solved the problem and proclaimed for herself what was wrong with Home-is-the-Woman’s-Sphere, and prescribed the remedy” (660). This “new woman” Grand identifies is one who has ideas that are independent of men’s, and most importantly, is capable of determining the fate of her own life.

⁴³ In their article “The Bicycle, Women’s Rights, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton,” Lisa S. Strange and Robert S. Brown remind us of the “significant role that cycling played in the debate over women’s rights in the late nineteenth century. While conservatives feared that cycling would compromise women’s femininity, damage their reproductive health, or even corrupt their morals, women’s rights activists seized upon the bicycle’s liberating potential” (610-11).

⁴⁴ Ann Heilmann agrees that the bicycle “significantly contributed to the transformation of gender relations,” particularly in things such as fashion (34-5).

⁴⁵ Schaffer notes that “when most people wrote and spoke about the ‘New Woman’ in the 1890s, they were usually referring to a very different figure: the unsexed, terrifying, violent Amazon ready to overturn the world” (39). The belief that freedom for women and the unsexed nature of women went hand in hand at the fin de siècle is essential in constructing the “terrifying” New Woman to whom Schaffer refers.

⁴⁶ In *Pantaloons and Power: A Nineteenth-Century Dress Reform in the United States*, Gayle V. Fischer notes that the Bloomer’s namesake, “Amelia Jenks Bloomer did not invent the garment, and she was not the first to wear or advocate it, but her name quickly became synonymous with the costume” (80). The original term for the shorter skirt and pantaloon outfit, “Turkish trousers,” thus becomes Anglicized.

⁴⁷ Stella Newton reminds us that dress reform was also greatly concerned with hygiene, and the use of wool and flannel in constructing clothing was considered to be a healthy alternative (98) to chemically treated and dyed materials (95).

⁴⁸ In *Reforming Women’s Fashion, 1850-1920: Politics, Health, and Art*, Patricia Cunningham notes that the artistic or aesthetic dress so popular with dress reformers was heavily influenced by history (103). The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood that was instrumental in popularizing aesthetic dress was interested “in depicting clothing so that it reveals a more natural human form. They achieved this largely by avoiding contemporary fashions and using instead historic costumes and drapery” (105). This interest in the “natural” human form requires “an apparent absence of corsetry” (113).

⁴⁹ In *The Science of Dress in Theory and Practice* (1885), Ada S. Ballin dedicates a lengthy section to the detriments of tight-lacing and the constant effects of the corset on the female form. In particular, she argues, “The deformity caused by tight stays is unfortunately generally effected so gradually during the years of growth that the sufferer is unconscious of any harm” (149). Leigh Summers does remind us that “The extent of tight lacing in Victorian Britain and North America continues to be topic of debate at least a century after its occurrence” (103), but the widespread Victorian conception of tight-lacing’s direct correlation with the deformity of the female body is too important to be ignored.

⁵⁰ Leigh Summers argues that “Stays were, as their name suggests, designed to make unruly female flesh ‘stay put’ and in doing so were also thought to arrest the potentially unruly and recalcitrant female mind” (5).

⁵¹ Leigh Summers also tells us that “Several dress reformers perceived the damage incurred by the corset as a matter not only of individual concern, but also of national concern” (108). This large-scale concern over the corset and the damage it did to all Englishwomen, regardless of class, is instrumental in sparking the design and production of various “healthy alternative” corsets throughout the century. One of the most famous, designed by Roxy Anne Caplin, was displayed at the Great Exhibition in 1851, and is currently in the fashion archives at the Museum of London (accession number 37.161/1).

⁵² Patricia A. Cunningham notes that the aesthetes of the Victorian era thought that the standards of art should be applied to dress, as well, and many aesthetes recognized the beauty and simplicity of Japanese designs (116). But as Greek statuary “exemplified” the Greek ideals so admired by the century as it is “a perfect example of an unaltered natural and beautiful figure,” those ideals “could be drawn on as standards for beauty and proportion” (116). The emphasis here is on naturalness, which seems essential both for the standard Victorian audience and the more radical aesthete audience.

⁵³ This is not the only moment in the book Allen makes a similar comparison of clothing’s purity to its wearer’s morality, but interestingly, he does so with Alan’s father, whose “shirt-front was as impeccable as his moral character was spotless” (98).

⁵⁴ In their article “The Man Who Wrote a New Woman Novel: Grant Allen’s *The Woman Who Did* and the Gendering of New Woman Authorship,” Vanessa Warne and Colette Colligan argue that despite the fact that “Allen portrays himself as a male version of the New Woman,” he in fact is not “her complement but her fiercest competitor” (24).

⁵⁵ In fact, Allen’s novel is referenced several times in *Ann Veronica*. There is worry over “All this Woman-who-Diddery” (102) on the part of Ann Veronica’s brother, Roddy, and her father expresses concern over the propensity of women for reading misleading fiction with “sham ideals and advanced notions, Women who Dids, and all that kind of thing” (23). It is possible that Allen’s discussions of fashion and Herminia in the novel is reflected in Wells’ discussions of fashion and Ann.

⁵⁶ In her article “‘Chloe Liked Olivia’: The Woman Scientist, Sex, and Suffrage,” Maroula Joannou explains that “Wells was not opposed to women’s suffrage but was deeply hostile to the social purity and anti-male strands within the organized feminist

movement which culminated in the slogan of the Women's Social and Political Union (the militant wing of the women's suffrage movement) 'Votes for Women and Chastity for Men'" (200). Because of this hostility on Wells's part, Joannou argues, many Suffragettes who make appearances in the novel appear to be near caricatures of Suffragette stereotypes and of real Suffragettes such as Christabel Pankhurst (201).

⁵⁷ Several critics take Wells to task for this transition from New Woman to what Joannou terms the "anodyne New Mother" (202). Joannou finds fault with the novel's insistence that Ann Veronica give up her scientific career to "fulfil [sic] a biological imperative" (202). In the article "Architects of the Erotic: H. G. Wells's 'New Women,'" Anne Simpson argues that "the novel's narrative distancing and lightly comic tone disempower the female protagonist by turning her into a picturesque figure who has been affectionately diminished" (42). However, I argue that the larger similarity between novels by male writers such as H. G. Wells and Grant Allen actually is supportive of the New Woman in all of her transitions, and through all of her discourses. Female novelists, too, insisted on the transition from New Woman to New Mother, as evidenced by Sarah Grand's defensive example of the bicycling wife and mother. Sylvia Hardy, however, approaches the conclusion to the novel as "a provocative slap in the face of Edwardian conventional opinion" as Ann Veronica is not punished but vindicated for her sexual and social transgressions (61). John Allett, too, agrees that "Wells is ambivalent about feminism" (63, emphasis original), but argues that "There is not one feminism represented in *Ann Veronica*, but several" (64).

⁵⁸ Anne B. Simpson suggests that "Ann's ruminations on what it means to be a woman in a repressive patriarchy are trivialized by the recurrence of a ditty that she finds herself compulsively composing in her head" (42).

⁵⁹ The March 8, 1912 issue of *Votes for Women* summarizes several newspaper reports of the incident (352).

⁶⁰ For the entire list of shops damaged and the monetary damage incurred, see "Shops that Suffered" in the March 8, 1912 issue of *Votes for Women* (353).

⁶¹ Caroline Howlett notes that the language of fashion is significantly changed by concealed weapons such as hammers or bricks, and that "Feminine dress could no longer be assumed to denote feminine subservience in its wearer, but on the other hand it could not, of course, be assumed to denote militancy: in other words, by 1913, femininity had lost its stability as a signifier in the heterosexual economy" (77).

⁶² Parkins sees a parallel between the way the militant Suffragettes were dressed and the way the mannequins were dressed to advertise the newest styles. She argues that that despite some critics' beliefs that the destruction of these similarly-dressed

mannequins is symbolically self-destructive, “women’s fashionable dress is a sign not of their victimization, but of their empowerment” (80).

⁶³ From the Women’s Library, collection #7KMA or 7/YYY6, Box FL639.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: FASHION AND NATION FORWARD

Dress is an intimate experience of all lives, as we all cover our bodies for protection from the elements or prying eyes; fashionable dress, too, can be an intimate experience, particularly of women's lives. The women of Cranford town demonstrate the daily and continuous role of fashionable dress in nineteenth-century women's lives, as their turbans and Indian shawls compose as important a national component to them as the conquests of the imperial expansion from which they originate. These articles of fashionable dress exemplify the public nature of fashion—its intention to be seen—which gains no small prominence in the nineteenth century. Nineteenth-century England, with the rapid changes it experiences socially, imperially, technologically, and nationally, becomes particularly mindful of the idea of the public, of visibility. Some of this mindfulness appears, more often than not, in the constant attempts at defining, and redefining, English womanhood, and through this, the constant degradation of women's concerns beyond the established parameters of the currently acceptable definition of English womanhood. As we have seen, these definitions for English womanhood are rewritten throughout the era, over seventy years, but very little shifts in the understanding of Victorian England's ideal of womanhood. Innocent, frank, beautiful, trustworthy, selfless, generous, religious, patriotic, these terms identify the woman those who speak for England believes it wants, and is determined to have. This innocence and selflessness often is written, as we see with Amelia Sedley, as artlessness, a "natural" ignorance of the construction and manipulation of beauty and body that fashion

supposedly makes so easy. Amelia's seeming unawareness of fashion and how best to construct her figure and beauty, that is, to lie about her "natural" body, is painted by Thackeray as the epitome of what England desires in its women. By claiming for a definition of Englishwoman a "natural" beauty and a "natural" style, Victorian England not only establishes a racial and national trait for its female citizens, it also establishes a racial and national feminine disregard for fashion's usefulness in establishing and enhancing beauty and style. Thus to understand fashion is to betray one's very nature, by the very definition of English womanhood. It should come as no surprise, then, that Victorian England writes such an understanding as both artfulness and foreignness.

Yet naturally the physical standards for English womanhood change over the many decades of Victoria's reign. While the pun of "naturally" is here intentional for humor, it is also intentional for emphasis. There may be racial similarities between Englishwomen, but there is of course no natural style inherent to any race, English, French, or otherwise. To appear as an Englishwoman, one must learn, through society, through what Judith Butler might call a "*stylized repetition of acts*" (179), through what Michel Foucault would understand as a disciplined body, what it is to be an Englishwoman, and further, how best to establish one's body as an Englishwoman. This—naturally—means learning the very artificiality against which Victorian England rails. Thus a double-bind exists in Victorian England for women: they must dismiss fashion as trivial at the same time they must utilize fashion to appear English. The Suffragettes understood this double-bind, and their attack on the West End shopping

district was, in no small part, a furious response to England's continuous and confusing standards of English womanhood.

By setting impossible standards of womanhood that rely heavily on the selflessness and passivity of its women, Victorian England attempts to confine its women not only symbolically but also nationally. If an Englishwoman is best defined by her ignorance, naturalness, and selflessness, then to be otherwise is to be foreign, or different, or simply the antithesis of English womanhood. We see this in non-English characters, certainly—the Diana Warwicks and Becky Sharps of Victorian literature—but so, too, do we see this with English characters, only foreignness is written as vanity and selfishness. Mary Barton, Aunt Esther, and Rosamond Vincy all are in danger of sexual, social, or financial falls not because they necessarily are the antithesis of English womanhood, that is, vain or selfish, but because Victorian England understands this antithesis through the arena of women's concerns. By paying specific attention to the construction of their clothing, the presentation of their bodies in dress, the particulars of fashion and accessories, these women pay specific attention to themselves during a time and in a country that expects utter selflessness, artlessness, and passivity from its women.

Still, Victorian England tells its women that so-called trivial concerns are the very things with which they should be interested. Certainly for Victorian England, a woman's interest in the nation should be in sole support of its international presentation and its esteem in the eyes of the world. By attempting in thought and in reality to confine women to a symbolic or literal private sphere of the domestic home, Victorian

England attempts to relegate women to a symbolic representation of that home. The home/Home similarity of domestic and national concerns seeks to emulate the so-called protection of the domestic sphere. In this sphere, and thus in the home, a woman should be concerned with domestic things. But by devaluing its women and relegating them to the private, domestic sphere, Victorian England in turn unconsciously devalues that sphere and all that is in it. This of course includes motherhood and marriage, but Victorian England responds publicly and vocally by choosing to devalue a rather visible scapegoat of women's concern: dress, particularly fashionable dress.

My argument, ultimately, is that Victorian women, both real and fictional, used dress and fashion to redefine English femininity. By taking control of a so-called trivial feminine concern, that "interesting feminine weakness" the author of *Dress* is so pitted against, Victorian women accomplished what their granddaughters and great-granddaughters in World War II accomplished literally with their fashions: they made do, and mended. Victorian women redefined their understanding of English womanhood to best suit their desires and their needs. As characters like Dorothea Brooke and Ann Veronica show, fashion and dress can be powerful tools in establishing a womanhood and an Englishness that are both innovative and recognizable to the society in which they existed. As writers like Harriet Martineau call for a greater understanding and appreciation of the real work women do for England through the fashion industry, so, too, do they call for a more active and vital role for women in the establishment and maintenance of England. The women of England, charged in 1839 by Sarah Stickney Ellis to protect their nation's moral wealth, were deeply and intimately involved with the

vast onslaught of national change carrying on around them, and those women, in 1912, protected their nation's moral wealth by demanding their right to participate actively in the nation's protection and continuation. By not only dressing England but also by dressing *for* England, as this dissertation's title asserts, Victorian women participated actively and intimately in the experience of their nation with the tools and in the arena available to them: dress, particularly fashionable dress. As we have seen in both the literature and the historical accounts of the period, throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, England and its women shift simultaneously, defined themselves, like fashion, by change.

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APPENDIX A

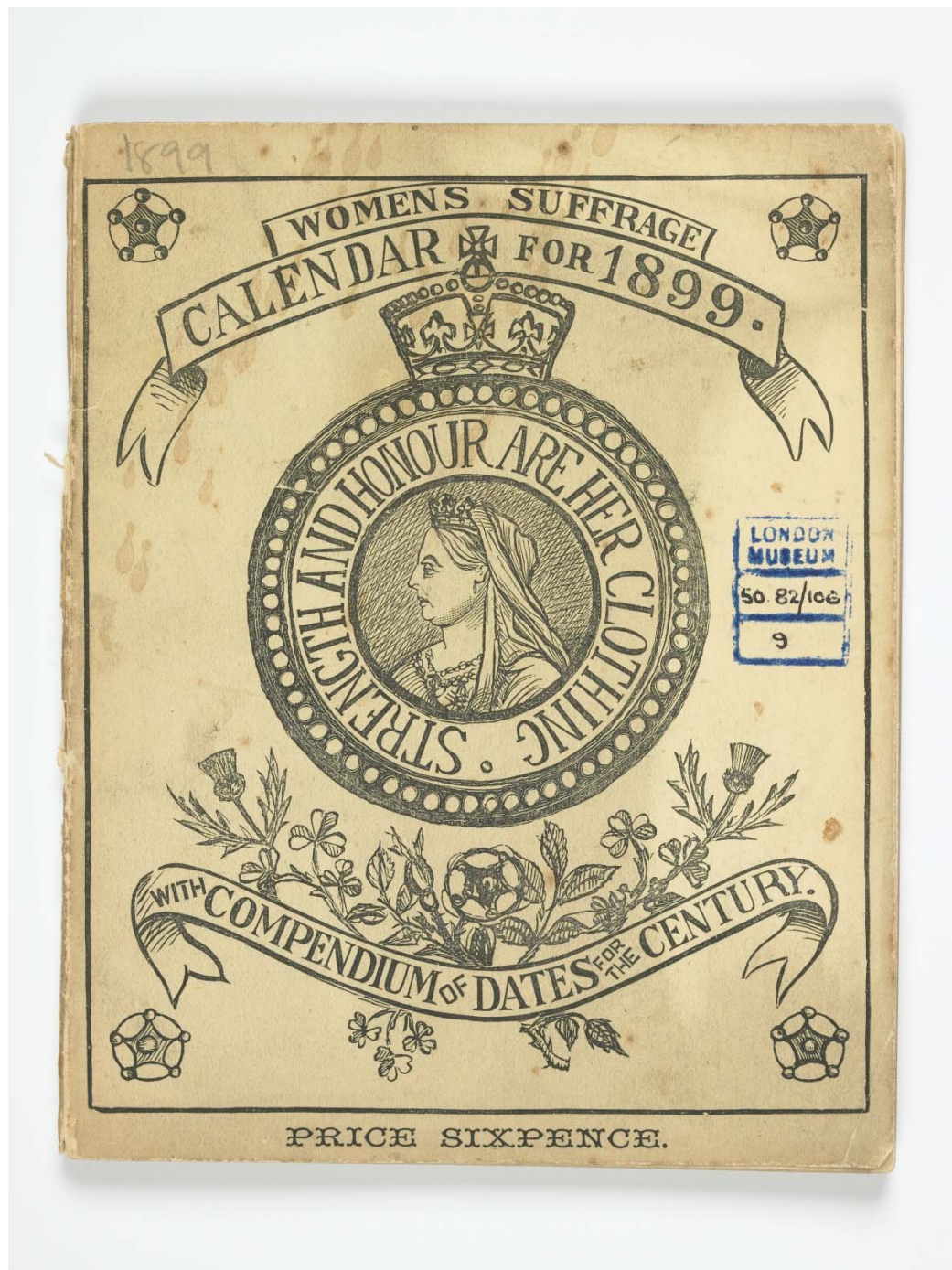


Fig. A-1. "Women's suffrage calendar for 1899." From the Museum of London's Women's Suffrage Collection, accession number 50.82/106. Reproduced by permission of the Museum of London. (c) Museum of London.



Fig. A-2. "A Lancashire Lass in Clogs and Shawl." From the Museum of London's Women's Suffrage Collection, accession number 50.82/1722. Reproduced by permission of the Museum of London. (c) Museum of London.



Fig. A-3. "Votes for Women! The Price We Pay, postcard." From the Museum of London's Women's Suffrage Collection, accession number NN22510. Reproduced by permission of the Museum of London. (c) Museum of London.



Fig. A-4. "Photograph of Suffragette demonstrating." From the Museum of London's Women's Suffrage Collection, accession number 001203. Reproduced by permission of the Museum of London. (c) Museum of London.



Fig. A-5. "Poster Parade, 20 June 1908." From the Museum of London's Women's Suffrage Collection, accession number 50.82/1558. Reproduced by permission of the Museum of London. (c) Museum of London.



Fig. A-6. "Photograph of Indian suffragettes." From the Museum of London's Women's Suffrage Collection, accession number 001489. Reproduced by permission of the Museum of London. (c) Museum of London.



Fig. A-7. "A group of suffragettes in the costume." From the Museum of London's Women's Suffrage Collection, accession number 50.82/1307. Reproduced by permission of the Museum of London. (c) Museum of London.

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